

The Earth Shall Claim Your Limbs: Martijn's Journey With Anal Cancer



Susan Hermse Schaefer

Muse River Publishing

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Cancer

This book is a true accounting of the final months of Martijn Hermse's life after his discovery of anal cancer. In that regard, it is a story of Martijn's incredible bravery and the paradox of wishing to hold tight to life, AND knowing when to let go gently and gracefully. His poise and balance were remarkable.

Grief

It is also my story - the story of the beloved losing her most precious love. I cover my own attempts to fight this disease by his side, and then to make his passage as peaceful as possible when the diagnosis turns terminal. I candidly admit to my mounting grief. *I told Alied, my grief therapist, that I must be depressed. And she said something so simple yet so profound: "Depression is an abnormal reaction to normal events; grief is a normal reaction to abnormal events."* (p.124)
I intend to publish a follow up book on grief.

Hope

Some 80 to 90 percent of anal cancers are caused by the human papillomavirus, or HPV, the same kind of virus that causes cervical cancer. A portion of all proceeds will go to Anal Cancer Research. I am available for fundraising events, through readings, lectures and appearances. Please contact me at: insights@lifeintrans.com.

***My overwhelming gratitude to Sally Eves
without whom I would not have survived.***

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**The Earth Shall Claim Your
Limbs: Martijn's Journey With
Anal Cancer** Pages

by Susan Hermse Schaefer

Sourced from Schaefer's Millennium 3
<http://schaefermillennium3.blogspot.com>

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Martijn and Susan's Wedding Day, Whitney Hotel, February 14, 1996, overlooking the Mississippi River at St. Anthony Falls

Susan Hermse Schaefer is a creative thinker, writer, speaker, professor, consultant, and global citizen. She met and married her beloved departed husband, Dutch citizen, Martijn Hermse, later in life and together they forged a magical existence.

Born and raised in edgy Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA, Susan's journey has included living in places such as Delhi, India, Bogotá, Colombia, Pompano Beach, Florida, Maastricht, the Netherlands, where this story takes place, and her current home Minneapolis, Minnesota, where her highrise perch overlooks the Mighty Mississippi River, a source of inspiration. Susan currently teaches Global Leadership at St. Catherine University and for the University of Minnesota's Osher Life Long Learning Institute (OLLI). She has an advanced degree in European Public Affairs from Maastricht University, and her Master's of Arts in English Literature from Temple University. Her passion is to inspire individuals to discover their highest purpose and seek answers in unexpected places.



Author and Aunt Ada Rosenbaum

Looking Backward, Looking Forward

Fri Mar 17 18:40:00 CST 2006 |

This book is derived from the blog I began in 2006, and which I dedicated to the memory of my Aunt Ada, who drank life like every day was a frothy cappuccino. This shot was taken just a year ago at my dear friend Cindy Serano's house in Pompano Beach Florida, near where Ada lived. Cindy was yet one more of her fans. Aunt Ada passed away at age 91 on March 5, 2006, just a few days after Martijn and I had a rare opportunity to spend some of her final days together. It was an honor to be in her company. Her life reminds me that we all need to drink up every day and fill someone else's cup with love. Ada lived well and died about as gracefully as one can. She remembered a lot about what was but always looked forward to what would

be. Even to that unknown place we will go.

Some friends say I inherited my Aunt Ada's spirit. That feels fortunate. I like to sing and laugh and it's true - I really love people. Well, most people. I've taken a new beginning for a patch of time here in Europe, in the Netherlands, in the medieval city of Maastricht, right here right on the River Muse (or Maas). I hope her waters sing to me like Ada used to and inspire me to find my way.

This blog is the place I'll share my days of beginning. Like Aunt Ada, I'll try to make every day a new one for discovery. And if I'm really lucky for insights and reflection. Come along with me and journey through this new millennium.



Healthy and happy at the European University Institute Ball in Fiesole, Italy, high above Florence, 2005

Martin's Corner

Fri Sep 21 09:35:00 CDT 2007 |

Martijn made the most of our stay In Italy, walking miles each day from our pleasant flat in the Rifredi section of Florence up up up the steep and lovely hillsides to meet me by lunchtime in the Mensa of EUT's famous Badia building. We stand in its courtyard in this photo which taken on Midsummer Night's Eve.

I will publish news of Martin's progress post surgery here. So, rather than sending out another email, if you are interested in how he managed, please check here later in the day on Thursday, September 27th European time. Maastricht is 6 hours AHEAD of America's east coast.

Think of us this way - happy and healthy - the way we would like to be again.



Martijn, Suze and friend David Fey enjoy a stolen moment before the surgery

Wednesday morning

Wed Sep 26 05:39:00 CDT 2007 |

On Monday night we feasted on a lovely home-made meal, prepared by Barbara Greenberg, an artist in the kitchen as well as the foundry. At Martijn's request, we watched some silly TV, and focused on the beauty of the present moment. It was a perfect, quiet evening for Martijn, fully aware of all those who are with us around the world.

Tuesday morning we packed him up a home-made lunch and stayed by Martijn's side at the hospital through the parade of specialists who arrived to explain what would take place the following day. At the end of the evening, we left Martijn to share some time alone with his Mother, Marcel and brother Janus.

Today our thoughts and prayers are with the team of surgeons and care givers to guide them in their attention to Martijn through his surgery and recovery. We know your thoughts are with us, and we will post again when as we learn more.



Martijn the day before surgery

Wednesday evening

Wed Sep 26 17:51:00 CDT 2007 |

Martijn came through over eight hours of surgery well, with a strong heart and vital signs. When Suze and Martijn's mother and brother visited him in recovery this evening, he was smiling and told them he was ready to begin his new life. That is the good news. But the tumor was much larger than the surgeons expected, and they were unable to remove all of it. We expect to learn more tomorrow about the extent of the remaining cancer, and the options for its treatment. We will post more information as soon as we can. In the meantime, thank you all for continuing to send your love and support.

Thursday evening

Thu Sep 27 15:37:00 CDT 2007 |

Martijn on Monday evening before surgery. This morning began badly, with news that Martijn had experienced internal bleeding during the night and was back in surgery. After three hours, the surgeon reported they had stopped the bleeding from a blood vessel in his abdomen, and that he was back in the recovery area. When we visited, he was sound asleep; small wonder after eight hours of surgery the previous day and then this additional procedure this morning.

We heard a slightly different story from the surgeon today about the status of the cancer. She said they had removed the whole tumor, but that they still needed to do an analysis to see if there was more cancer. In any case, we will

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not have the results of this analysis until Thursday. So, in the meantime, the focus is entirely on Martijn's recovery from this extensive, two-stage surgery.

When we visited him again after dinner, Martijn was awake and sounding very much like himself: complaining about the care at the hospital and criticizing various political leaders, past and present! It was very reassuring, as you can imagine. His color also looked good, but it was clear that his body is badly depleted by this whole ordeal, and that what he needs most of all right now is to rest and heal.

They are planning to move him back to his private room in the morning, and we expect that he will remain in the hospital for at least three weeks. They have him in a very special bed that uses sand and air to support him comfortably and facilitate the healing process. We don't expect to learn anything more about the cancer situation until Thursday next week, but we will continue to post updates. If you wish send cheerful cards, notes or photos, as we will post them in his room. Martijn will not be able to use email for quite some time to come. But if you like, please post comments on the blog. Suze will read these.



Martijn with Roberta and David in Eijsden, autumn 2005

Friday evening

Fri Sep 28 17:21:00 CDT 2007 |

Today was a good day. After his second surgery to stop the internal bleeding yesterday, Martijn rested through the night enough so his medical team felt he could be moved to a regular room on the surgical floor. It's a private room with a huge western facing picture window that overlooks the lovely wooded Maastricht countryside. This evening's sunset flooded his room and we sat together watching glorious autumnal colors streak the night sky. Never was seeing a sunset more appreciated.

Earlier in the day his brother Janus, mother Geri and her life partner, Marcel, visited and we chatted happily aware that Martijn has won another day. And, that is how it will be; I am deeply conscious of the fragile threads that link this strong and spirited man to his mortal coil. They are the tubes that currently feed him oxygen, hydration (as he is still not permitted food or water), and drain his fluids and surgical wounds from many orifices, natural and man made. My good friend Nancy said Martijn was like a soldier who had been blown apart on the battle field, only a soldier would not have been previously weakened by chemo therapy, radiation and wasted by the cancer itself. Being with him today, chatting as though he was not tethered to so many life supports was excellent for my spirit, but after yesterday's frightening realities, I understand the paradox of appreciating each new day while respecting the tentativeness of everything.

David Fey departed this morning. I simply would not have made it through these last days without his absolute friendship and quiet, steady support. He complimented my brother-in-law, Janus, who knew what to do, what to ask, when to be where. They allowed me to concentrate only on my love for Martijn,

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the greatest gift at this time. Completing the triage trinity has also been our guardian spirit Barbara Greenberg, anticipating the needs of sustenance and transport. It is as though she possess a spiritual GPS.

It is very late here tonight and I'm at once exhilarated at the capacity Martijn has to regenerate, but more, to soar in this moment; at the same time I'm exhausted to my core, reaching for more energy to endure this journey. And the moment I doubt my ability to replenish, the palpable field of energy that fills Martijn and me with light and life buoys me. You have created this force field. You are literally participating in this road to recovery.

If there is any lesson in this ordeal, it is that the human capacity to love conquers fear and loneliness and stimulates healing. You are so integral to our survival - so willing to walk this path with us. Before I left Martijn this evening, bathed in the fleeting light of sunset, he turned and said to me, "Please tell everyone that I feel their love and support and wish to be able to return it." And, he added, his humor healthy and in tact as his body is not, "I also wish to sit on a terrace with an ice-cold Hoegarden beer with a sliver of lemon!" Here's hoping he gets all his wishes. More later.



Martijn with Dorothé and Aad at the Belgian coast October 2006

Saturday evening

Sat Sep 29 16:11:00 CDT 2007 |

Another relatively good day. Martijn slept well and was in okay spirits in the morning. He had his first (soft) food and water in three days. The problem is that – bless his soul – Martijn's infamous appetite won over caution. He ate a bit more than his weakened system with its massive wounds and colostomy bag could handle. Not to mention the fact that Martijn must lay almost immobilized and flat on his back. When I left him at the end of visiting hours he wasn't feeling well and hoped that the quivers of indigestion wouldn't accelerate during the night.

Still, good friends from the Den Haag, Dorothé and Aad, pictured above during a nice weekend holiday a year ago, paid a warm visit to the hospital. They offered to stay the night with me and when I was back from my evening visit to Martijn I found that they had quietly and generously cleaned our house – top to bottom!

While I report each step Martijn takes forward, I am acutely aware of the steps back. His taking in real food today meant the nurses could remove the tube that went from his nose to his stomach. This small triumph was offset by the fact that the team decided to reinsert his oxygen tube which they had removed earlier in the day.

When a person is forced to lie flat on his back his lungs often do not produce sufficient capacity. This situation merely highlights the continued dangers. Martijn is facing the reality that his wounds will take a very long time to heal

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due to the permanent deterioration caused to his tissue by the previous radiation. There is a slight chance the tissue cannot mend. Then, there is a risk for infection, ironically increased by being in the very hospital setting that now keeps him alive. Lying still on ones back increases the chance for swelling and collecting of fluids in the extremities and blood clotting. The list goes on.

Yet, Martijn's spirit is still very strong. He mentioned that he had had an emotional morning and I told him I couldn't imagine otherwise. Again he asked that I tell each of you how he felt surrounded by your love and wishes and that this powerful force will help him through the days, and nights, to come. Peace be with you. Susan



Thérèse & Rob Frank relax with us at our former apartment in Maastricht.

There's a Hole in Bed Where You're Supposed To Be

Sun Sep 30 16:08:00 CDT 2007 |

As predicted last night was heavy for Martijn – he didn't process the food and had a very very bad night vomiting. This is dangerous on two accounts – when you are lying flat on back you can choke to death; when you have tenuous deep wounds everywhere in your lower track...well you get the picture. Happily, he rallied after the nursing team reinserted the stomach tube that drains the bile from his stomach. Today he was back on no food and water, marking the fifth day of such a regime.

Nevertheless, he had asked to see another set of very old dear friends, Thérèse & Rob Frank, now of Rotterdam. Martijn was Rob's roommate in university. We had a very nice visit and they marveled at Martijn's resilience in the face of all this. Later, they drove me home where we shared tea and conversation. Before I headed back to the hospital, I simply collapsed, taking an unaccustomed 15-minute power nap. It was enough to refresh me. Our neighbor and dear friend Audrey drove and accompanied me to the hospital where Martijn rested again bathed in an autumnal sunset. Hopefully this evening he'll rest well since tomorrow is a big day with the possible removal of the epidural (spinal tap) that has provided precious relief from pain. I'm certainly not looking forward to this next stage, but I'll be there for whatever support I can muster. Basically, Martijn seems stable and progressing nicely post-surgery. His spirit is still very high and tonight he cried explaining that he truly feels the love of so many people helping through these stages of recovery. We are both beyond words of gratitude for you, a member of this healing community.

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Before I turn in here are a few simple things that can cause my tears to flow: hanging one towel and washcloth in the bathroom where two sets always sit; seeing the dishwasher fill slowly with one set of everything instead of two; beginning to fall asleep and waiting for the nightly backrub that doesn't happen and the "ribbit ribbit" chant we usually prattle every night before snuggling off to sleep. It's not just about the pain, the fear, the uncertainty, you see, but about the tangible heart-rending absence of things familiar and beloved. I remember a line from a John Lennon song that goes something like: "...there's a hole in bed where you're supposed to be...."



Yulan San, Bob Ingram and the two of us at the castle ruins in historic Valkenburg, just outside Maastricht in summer 2006.

Monday brings progress

Mon Oct 01 15:22:00 CDT 2007 |Another good day for Martijn. He drank one cup of bullion very slowly and produced his first "bagged bowel movement" - an important accomplishment heralded by his medical team! We had his massive sand bed shifted so that he could face the television, a service that we began today as well. Also, they constructed an apparatus over his bed with a hanging metal triangle so that mercifully he can lift himself occasionally providing moments of relief from the flat on his back position. And, they took him off the oxygen and clamped the stomach tube. However, they left both tubes in, just to be sure he's on his way with lung capacity and eating, respectively. His wounds continue to drain properly, so such as it is, Martijn is making progress.

Spending the early morning and afternoon hours alone together was almost cozy. When mother, Marcel and his youngest brother Noel arrived, I felt cramped, and actually a bit uncomfortable. It felt too busy. I sense that Martijn needs more quiet and we agreed that tomorrow we'll make a better plan about who comes at what time.

There was a little break tonight. Our friend Frank visited Martijn at the end of the afternoon bringing nice books on cd and we left together to have a little dinner out. A moment of normalcy in a sea of abnormal.

My stress peaked today - a visual migraine and extreme intestinal disruption lowered my energy level significantly. Thankfully I have a shiatsu scheduled for tomorrow as well as a trip to the cancer support organization here, the Toen Hermans Huis, that my dear friend Ursula scheduled and will accompany me.

This week brings the removal of the epidural which they delayed until

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tomorrow and the pathology results from the tumor on Thursday. My brother-in-law, Jan, will return to be with me for that momentous moment. I hope for a good night's sleep for both of us and each of you. Sweet dreams, Suze



Ursula Glunk

Support in Many Flavors

Tue Oct 02 16:47:00 CDT 2007 | Martijn made good progress today. They removed his oxygen tube and stomach drain. He's a lot less bionic looking sans those protuberances sprouting from his nose. The nursing staff clean shaved him this morning so the overall effect has him looking rosy for such sick guy! There are still many problems with food intake. He is suffering from expected hiccups and reflux due to multiple factors: the surgeons removed most of his own stomach fat during the surgery – while we all joke about fat, the fact is you need this layer to aid digestion;



Barbara Greenberg

Martijn didn't have much fat there to begin with and now he's growing his own from tissue and fat harvested from his butt and thigh. The absence of this critical layer is slowing his digestive progress. And, as we've said, he's flat on his back. Imagine trying to sip soup or water in that manner. It's difficult enough when we are healthy. The hics and reflux can also keep his sleep at bay, not a good thing when he's trying to recover from such a massive assault on his body. Hopefully each day will help this situation to mend. His outer scars are healing nicely. The true test, however, will be the inner mending. Time will tell. I've administered daily foot massage with a thick, natural hemp product from the Body Shop. Overnight after

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the surgery it seems Martijn's feet turned to leather. The massages seem to bring some relief to his swollen legs and feet and tomorrow the physical therapist is supposed to begin work to help his legs from swelling more. I took a little TLC myself this morning, seeking an unbelievably needed Shiatsu massage from my therapist, the angel Simone Peerdeman. Not only does she move my body but my soul. I mentioned to her that David Fey had practiced some mindfulness meditations he received from Thich Nhat Hahn whom he had the rare opportunity to study with. When I rose from my relaxed state, Simone had produced a lovely postcard of the master himself, signed with love and light to Martijn. Now Thich Nhat Hahn's likeness faces Martijn across his bed on the handy little bulletin board each room sports.

After my massage I attended an eye opening meeting at the Toon Hermans Huis, the Netherlands's premiere cancer support organization. Ursula arranged the meeting and accompanied me. We learned of the many and varied services offered to patients and partners such as healthy cooking classes, art workshops, relaxation and meditation classes, and so on. While giving us a mini-tour, our counselor, France, led us into the finale of the cooking class and we were kindly invited to sample a portion of today's lesson – a sort of pureed eggplant guacamole. The chef, the volunteers, the clients were each nicer than the other and I'm sure we will make good use of this service.

Back at the hospital Martijn enjoyed a bit of pampering from Barbara Greenberg, who had enlisted to read to Martijn which is just what she did today. We passed a very quiet time listening to her superb reading voice. In fact, I hear it now, in my head and I'm going to listen as I drift to a better night's sleep. You, too! Suze



The Two of Us, October 2006

One Week After Surgery

Wed Oct 03 14:01:00 CDT 2007 |

It's difficult to believe that just one week ago Martijn was under the knife for eight whole hours. Today they removed his spinal epidural that supplied pain medication directly to the wounded areas. From nine tubes in, now only four remain: two draining the large wounds of his buttocks, stomach and thigh (where they removed a large muscle to replace one in his stomach area), the hydration intravenous, and his urine tube. Although last night he again vomited his oral food intake, he bravely tried again today, eating breakfast, lunch and dinner - foods like yogurt, broth and pureed meat and veggies. I supplied some organic honey to add to his yogurt and some propolis with honey. Both are natural antibiotics and help fight infection.

Today, one of the surgeons explained that it could take a while for his stomach to "kick back in" since almost all his natural fat was surgically removed from that area. Fat helps us process our meals, as I mentioned yesterday. However, when I left this evening he was feeling much better.

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Me too. I walked home from the hospital - a leisurely 15-20 minute walk, reheated the tofu stir fry I'd cooked last night and even dared to drink a cosmopolitan with locally grown organic cranberry juice - a solitary celebration of Martijn passing a week marked with more progress than setbacks (knock wood). We spent the day almost alone with the exception of Barbara's second reading installment - a great pleasure for both of us.

We send our heartfelt thanks again to each of you. Your prayers, meditations, good wishes, support, emails, postings, cards and love continue to work the magic that is healing. Thank you simply doesn't seem enough. We have a long road to walk with much uncertainty ahead, but with you by our side we are stronger and connected to a force beyond the recognition of our mortal minds. Sleep well, The story continues.



Continuing Education for Mind, Body

Healing touch soothes horrendous tidings

Thu Oct 04 16:46:00 CDT 2007 |

Healing Touch

This morning an actual angel named Geraldine K. Hartmayer performed a profound healing on Martijn. In an astounding coincidence, Gerry “found” us just two days before she departs Maastricht where she and her husband, Bob, have lived for the past 8 years to move back to the States. Gerry felt compelled to contact me after she read an email I posted to members of my International Women’s Club (IWC) explaining Martijn’s condition and why I wouldn’t be attending any of the club’s various functions. Although her email moved me, initially I was not in a shape or mood to respond to her generous offer. That same evening, one of our most engaging neighbors, a young woman named Danielle, while walking her puppy, Xeno, literally ran into Gerry, who was out on her customary walk. Gerry asked if she could pet Xeno and for a strange and wondrous reason, Danielle told Gerry that she was very worried about her neighbor, Susan, who was herself so worried about her ill husband. Gerry asked if that was Susan Schaefer. Imagine this. When Danielle, in shock, replied, “yes”, Gerry asked her kindly to show her where we lived and to give me a personal note and brochure about healing touch. Not even knowing this part of this amazing serendipitous story, I called Gerry after Danielle got the note to me. The rest, as they say, is history. Gerry not only performed a deeply transformative healing on both Martijn and me, but later this evening, she hosted me at her rooftop home overlooking the River Maas, just two blocks from ours. Here, the third coincidence occurred. A meeting of healers was taking place, so Gerry introduced me to “The Healing Touch Program”, a medically based energy therapy training program for nurses. It is considered one of the leading energy medicine programs in the world. <http://www.healingtouchprogram.com> I plan to stay in touch with energetic Gerry and

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Martino with his semi-annual cigarillo last summer

these other women and hope to help one of them who would like to start her own clinic here in Maastricht.

Understanding the power of one's self to heal from within will help lessen the shock of the details of Martijn's surgery. One of his favorite surgeons, Dr. Keymueller, spent a lot of time with us just after the healing. While we still won't have the full pathology report on the tumor itself for another week (due to the fact that the pathologists were attending a conference today), Dr. Keymueller explained in great detail about the surgery and the tumor. The tumor was at least 7 x 5 cm and had extended up from the anus into Martijn's rectum, rectal lymph nodes, groin lymph nodes and his spine. Today I learned they removed his coccyx and a long section of his spine. She said they were astounded by how large the tumor was – this was entirely unexpected. She feels that they removed most of the tumor, and the lymph nodes that had been infected, but naturally she said they can't be sure until they get the pathology report back, and even then, they will continue to check. She and we completely understand that right now the singular most important thing is for Martijn to heal from this traumatic surgery. Nothing else really matters.

Today, for the first time, I saw the size of the surgery on Martijn's posterior. I will spare you the details. All I can say is that my husband has endured unimaginable surgery and is strong and stunning in his bravery and demeanor.

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Today they removed yet another tube, his catheter and now he's darn proud to be peeing on his on. No mean feat when you do this while basically immobilized flat on your back. His humor is typical Martijn, his appetite continues to amaze and delight me, his pain is well managed, and he's in great shape for the shape he's in!

The plastic surgeon, who to me is like a zen master, is very pleased at Martijn's overall health and progress, but he warned us that the next four to five days are the critical time for such "transplant" surgery – when the infections can set in. Yet, Dr. Keymueller reassured me that the very fact that Martijn is doing so well is an indication that even should the infections happen, they are well equipped to deal with them. The bigger problem is still that the inside tissue that was so damaged by the radiation needs to mend.

This morning's healing was focused precisely on that problem. So, dear friends, we couldn't be doing more, blending West with East, love with medicine, and faith with reality. Please keep your meditations flowing as we continue on this path to healing and hopefully to wellness.

Tomorrow another dear friend from Minnesota, Carol Malkinson, arrives to be with Martijn and me through this tense yet inspiring adventure. From the bottom of our hearts, we love you.

Mixed Bag

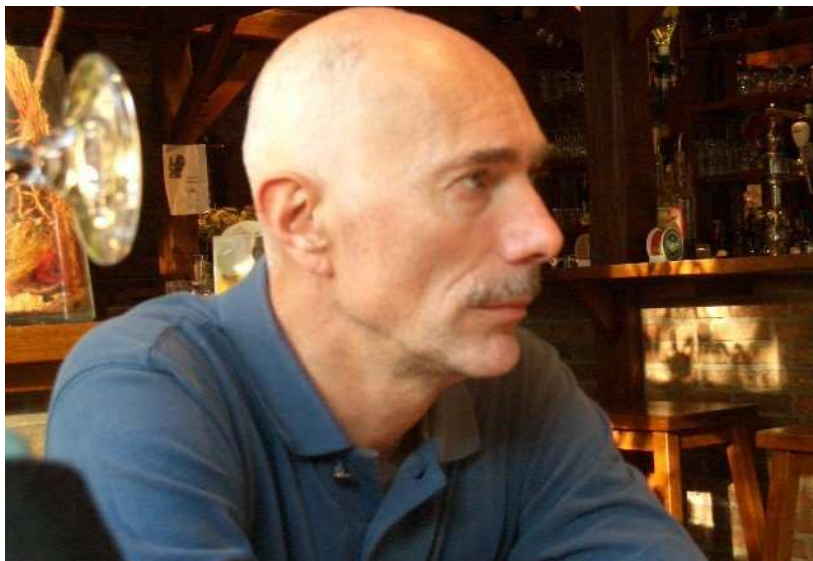
Fri Oct 05 15:44:00 CDT 2007 |

It was a bonus weather day here in Maastricht – a perfect greeting for dear friend Carol Malkinson's arrival from Minnesota. Once again, Barbara Greenberg graciously chauffeured me to and from the airport to greet a friend who's come lend love and support. With a mint blue sky, we took advantage and walked immediately to the hospital where Martijn eagerly awaited Carol's arrival. Unfortunately, the accumulated stress of lying flat on his back added to the fact that the hospital once again served a too heavy lunch impacted Martijn's ability to digest food. Just as we entered we could see that from his ashen demeanor that things weren't well and he vomited violently. Trooper that he is, we later joked a little that Carol evokes such a strong response from all her "men"!

But, I find this issue increasingly not funny. The trauma of the surgery is one thing, the prone position entirely another. I'm going to request a meeting with the dietary staff and either Martijn will agree to go on intravenous nutrition at least until he's not flat, or we have to figure out how to prepare nutritious yet perfectly easy to digest meals. After feeding and settling Carol in back at our home I returned for a quiet afternoon snuggled against Martijn. Today they also removed his hydration IV so we're able to hug and snuggle with less tube interference, albeit imperfectly. Now only his wound drainage tubes remain, a great relief as long as we can work out the nutrition issue.

Tonight I cooked up a yummy fully organic carrot, yogurt, honey and ginger (great for digestion) meal that I pureed and intend to proffer him tomorrow for lunch. Also, I'll bring papaya enzyme which can help Martijn's acid reflux in a most natural way. Isn't it simply amazing that hospitals don't integrate natural with medical? I really don't get how with all the information on holistic approaches available that the medical field stays in the dark ages.

When I phoned for my nightly good night, Martijn thought he'd be able to rest better this evening. Please light your candles and send healing sleep his way. I will, too. Good night, sweet friends.



Martijn, Liege (Luik) October 2005

A Sunny Saturday

Sat Oct 06 12:46:00 CDT 2007 |

Martijn had a good day. He ate, it stayed down, he had good color in his face and good humor. We visited, bought him the NRC weekend edition which will keep him happy and occupied with "quality" reading, as he likes to comment. Tomorrow I hope to make a two minute video interview about his impressions of this entire ordeal. I'll post it here for all to see.

The above photo is from a happy, healthy afternoon in Liege two years ago; tonight Barbara Greenberg will bring Carol and me to see Liege's famous first Saturday of October festival of lights where they will illuminate the whole city with candles. I'll say a little prayer that each one brings a day of health and healing to Martijn. In light, Suze



Under the red umbrella, 1995, Tilberg, the Netherlands



High school shots

Two Souls Destined Together

Sun Oct 07 17:19:00 CDT 2007 |

Two Souls Destined Together, Jang's Garden, Tilburg, June 1995 (Rob Chizek, photographer)

Friends have asked me how I'm feeling. Really feeling. The pat answer is that depends on the moment – and there's a lot of truth in the answer. But naturally there are traceable underlying feelings about this situation that remain consistent regardless of how I perceive Martijn is or isn't doing.

I am deeply and profoundly sad. I miss Martijn as a part of my daily life. Even when we argued and bickered,

when we got on each other's nerves or pissed each other off, we ended almost every night of our "going on 13 years" with a cuddle, snuggle and backrub (for me). We have spent a total of only five or so weeks apart in all this time, period. Martijn accompanied me on almost every business trip I ever made. Many of our other coupled friends have spent much time apart due to the travel schedule of one or the other partner. Martijn and I always joke that this meant we've really been "together" at least double our 13 years since we've been almost inseparable. And we like that. Really enjoy each other's company. Aside from partners and lovers we are best friends. So, my sadness at being apart runs deep. I am scared – frightened that this

blackguardly foe, this formidable enemy, cancer, has only momentarily been hacked back, chopped away from Martijn's body in a most brutal excision, but only temporarily foiled. All my spiritual energy and positive beliefs don't fully vanquish this niggling fear. How can they? If I succumb to the light and energy and Martijn is ultimately taken from me – what will happen then TO ME? To me? So the fear lets me prepare for this impossibility, or so one stubborn part of me believes. I perform my morning meditations, say my childhood “now I lay me down to sleep,” prayers, light candles at every shrine in Maastricht in the sincere belief that each candle, each meditation, each prayer is in fact a powerful healing beam lasering this cancer, this foe to be respected for its destructive force, its perseverance. I light the candle that our dear friend Audrey offered with it's mixed Buddhist/Christian prayer pinned on it, recite the lovely Native American Indian prayer to the Creator offered by dear friend Michael, whose unwavering faith serves as beacon to me, light the candles sent by dear friends Jang and Marion, candles of natural bee's wax filled with their pure love and friendship, and light my own dear Shabbat candles feeling deeply the primal brave resolve of my Jewish ancestors. Yet I remain scared.

I am angry. You even get angry with the patient. How could Martijn who was never sick a day in his life let this cancer in? Angry that our life together which has certainly not been easy by a long shot but was finally settling into a nice prospective future is now shattered, really as shattered as Martijn's lovely body that has been sliced and cut and radiated and chemically burned. I am angry that this tumor which was so large, 7 x5 CM was not seen, not detected by all this medically advanced equipment so that Martijn didn't have to go through his last months of agony. Angry that the hospital now isn't more attuned to the extreme needs of someone so traumatically dissected and flat on his back – serving heavy food that makes him sicker. Angry that I have no work, no career at present to keep me sane, on track, productive. Angry that my Dutch is yet not good enough to talk in meaningful nuances to my mother-in-law, Geri, to Marcel, to the nurses, and to the many others here who are so supportive and kind. So angry, so scared, so sad.

And then, just as these feelings wash over me, there come these intense feelings of gratitude for my very unique life, a life shared with someone as rare as Martijn. His unconditional love has bathed my soul for all these years; his contrarian nature, whacky humor, gentleness to the extreme, have fed me, nourished me, guided me and wrapped me in a protective sheath that many individuals will never know. We have a funny kind of love. People know we are oddly matched, that the relationship seems a bit imbalanced, tilted to my strength on the practical side of the ledger – the worker, the bringer home of the bacon. But the truth is so plain for any who choose to see it: I couldn't have done any of my so-called “business” feats without this great man beside me. Martijn and I often say to each other how truly amazing it is that in this great wide world we met and grew together. The true odd couple.

On our bedroom wall is this wedding saying from the Kabbalah: From every human being there rises a light that reaches straight to heaven and when TWO

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Recovering totally still in AzM hospital

SOULS that are DESTINED to be TOGETHER find each other, their strings of light flow together and a single brighter light goes forth from their united being.

Today one little soul realized that that other little soul's homemade cooking was better for his mind, body and soul than that of the hospital. Having spent another bad night due to extreme discomfort from having chowed down on heavy meat and veggies, he didn't eat much all day. I steamed up some organic carrots, blended them together with organic whole yogurt and honey with a dash of ginger syrup. Like the old funny American television commercial for a new cereal, I can say "Marty likes it!" I added some small cubes of fresh goat cheese with a few "leafs" of salted rice crackers as a side dish, and added mashed banana and honey to the hospital's truly gruesome rice gruel, rendering it tasty and healthier. Honey is a miracle food and it is light on Martijn's freaked out tummy. Thankfully he began to eat this with some of his former gusto. Now more than anything Martijn needs nutrition and digestibility. I'll happily do the cooking. I spent an entire summer learning about food, nutrition and healing when I worked at Philly's first health food restaurant owned by one of my longest term best friends, Nancy Carolan. I've practiced healthy eating my whole life. It feels like a dress rehearsal for this day.

When we had our goodnight call, Martijn told me he was feeling better, watching a "quality" program on Dutch telly. Now I can rest easier. My feelings mostly ebb and flow with Martin's well-being. I was told today to try to take some distance to help preserve myself. While that is good advice I guess I'm satisfied that our feelings like our souls flow together from our united being.

Good night, sweet dreams. Suze

had the same. Restfully, Susan

Food for the Soul

Mon Oct 08 14:37:00 CDT 2007 |

The frontier here and now is adequate, digestible nutrition. Martijn continues to heal well, but true recovery means building up his entire system and food intake has become the single most stubborn obstacle. Today the mountain came to Mohammed. We finally tracked down his (very) young hospital nutritionist who readily admitted that there are terrible limitations in the hospital fare and not much room for change. However, after a lengthy discussion, Martijn asked the right question: what do you do when people are vegetarians? Ah ha, eureka - we have now changed his menu preference to vegetarian and the selection will include many more appropriate choices such as "Activa" type bio yogurts, omelets and other better choices. Tonight I prepared a tasty helping of lightly breaded turkey cutlets, marinated in a bio yogurt and tamari sauce, with steamed broccoli. Carol and I enjoyed it and tomorrow Martijn will have this warmed up. The following day his new regime should kick in so fingers crossed for a healthier change. Meanwhile, we are still anticipating finding out more about the pathology of the tumor(s) late on Thursday. Martijn was peacefully watching CSI on the telly when I made my goodnight call, hoping for a better rest. Carol and I are snuggling down for a quiet evening of BBC detectives. Today was a good day. I hope you

Mending

Tue Oct 09 15:10:00 CDT 2007 |

Martijn, October 9, 2007, AZM (Academic Hospital Maastricht), FloorA4, Room 6

Today was a good day. Here you see Martijn for yourself. The changeover to vegetarian food has been successful so far. With his appetite up and running and food that is more digestible, Martijn is truly on the mend. Tomorrow we'll post a short video so he can express his gratitude to you for your well wishes.

Martijn Gives Thanks for Your Support

Wed Oct 10 14:20:00 CDT 2007 |

Please click on the arrow to see and hear Martijn discuss his gratitude for your healing thoughts and prayers.



Carol Malkinson brings warmth and love Neighbor Audrey consoles

The Sisterhood and Learning More

Thu Oct 11 17:58:00 CDT 2007 |

Carol and Audrey below bring some cheer to Martijn yesterday and today.

I waited all afternoon for Martin's doctors to arrive to tell us what they know about the pathology of the tumors. After his dinner we asked one of the main "floor" nurses to please find out why no one yet had come to us. This nurse seemed to understand that we were both very frustrated with the lack of communication and follow through and assured us that tomorrow someone would come. So, I left my sweetie who seemed satisfied to relax a bit before his mother and Aunt "Zus" would come for a short evening visit.

My evening was a spontaneous meeting of the Divine Secrets of the Ma-Ma Sisterhood - an impromptu gathering of a few good women friends - Barbara Greenberg, Casey O'Dell, Audrey Sodijker, Claudia Vaz and Johanna Martinez - who graciously each cooked a dish or brought a nice bottle of wine to share with Carol and me. A night of easy chatting, simple pleasures shared in the shadow of Martin's illness and absence from our home. What seems like a lifetime ago now I had threatened to instigate a Ma-Ma (Maastricht) Sisterhood before cancer altered all agendas and plans. How coincidental it was then that when I phoned Martijn to have our good night conversation he told me that the Sandra Bullock, Ellyn Burstn Ya-Ya Sisterhood film was actually on telly this evening! So, after our real Ma-Mas left, Carol and I snuggled in to enjoy this tale of friendship and loyalty.

But only after Martijn had told me that late in the evening Dr. Keymueller had come to him to explain that they know there is still cancer in five lymph nodes. She will return tomorrow afternoon so that we can learn more what this means. While this is not the news we hoped for, it is not shocking - she's been

indicating that this could be the case all along. A part of me believes they've known this and simply decided to give us time to heal from the initial trauma of the entire surgery. I asked Martijn how he felt and he said he needed to process this information. A gentle understatement. He doesn't want to upset me; I don't want to upset him. Today an old friend from Minnesota sent a brief email with a story of immense hope about her relative who was diagnosed with 4th stage throat cancer and given only a 10% chance to live. He's going strong five years later. There are many stories like this to help us through.

Right now all I can do is think of tomorrow and seeing Martijn and hugging him. Really all. Tonight we had a gathering of lovely, strong, compassionate women willing to embrace us, share our life and make one night divine. There will be many more days and evenings like this. So for now, keep us in your prayers. Light another candle; sing a silly song; laugh at the moon. Susan



Rich Heck, Suzanne Kochevar and the two of us, April 2005

Time to Reflect

Fri Oct 12 16:48:00 CDT 2007 |

We met with our surgeon, Dr. Keymeuller. We have much information to process. It is best to take time to reflect and remember all the wonderful moments we have in our life, like this one, shared with our dear friends Suzanne and Rich who spent two glorious weeks with us here in Maastricht in Spring 2005. We shared this luncheon by an old mill on the way from Monet's Garden to the Tuileries. It was a glorious adventure filled with great friendship, wine, food, conversation and sights and sounds of a lifetime. Sleep well and count every blessing, Susan



Martin's main surgeon, Dr. Keymueller



Martin's mother, Geri Mullens, and her partner, Macel Winten

Paradox and love

Sun Oct 14 11:08:00 CDT 2007 |

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke says, "love...consists in this, that two solitudes protect and border and slaute each other." I stand resolute in this definition of love, the kind that Martijn and I share. Now I embrace my solitude. I always fled from it. I seek company but rejoice in my solitude because there I find a limitless well filled by the love I have for Martijn and he for me. I'm not used to being alone but I feel much less so every day because, frankly, I'm not. This love we share grows beyond the borders of physical presence.

Friday Dr. Keymueller, pictured above, compassionately and frankly disclosed to us that Martin's particular cancer pathology, anal squamous cell, does not/will not respond to any further treatment now known. She clarified that all of the cancer HAS BEEN removed, but was resolute in stating that this particular cancer is known to return and aggressively. The message is that this cancer is terminal and currently untreatable. Martin's response was, "So, I'm a ticking timebomb, eh?"

We didn't ask any questions like how long? They are pointless questions. Rather, we seek the current flip side of this news - that Martijn in fact has more than survived the surgery, but is once again thriving - filled with energy and appetite. Our goal is to have him continue to grow strong, to make progress, to sit up, to walk again, to return home.

I did call two of my best friends, Allan Crimm and David Meyers, both medical doctors, to discuss any options currently known to treat this medically. They both responded in kind, that no medical protocol currently is known to combat the cancer in such a way that it prolongs the life of the patient with quality outweighing the downsides of the treatment. However, David located what are

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called "medical trials" here in the Netherlands. We may explore these in time.

The paradox is how strong and vital Martijn continues to grow, and that at least for this moment, he is cancer free. So, our protocol will be more alternative healing and requests from you, for as long as you can give us, to keep him cancer free and healthy. We will eat well, organically, and simply rejoice in the current moment. We will meditate and wallow in the love of family, friends and colleagues. Really, what more can anyone do, anyway?

Tonight on the way home I petted a very old but happy cat and watched in awe the swans who greet me at the end of the canal path from the hospital. The swan is one of the oldest names in the English language. According to the book *Animal Speak* by Ted Andrews, it is the totem of the child, the poet, the mystic, and the dreamer. What better totem to symbolize Martijn?

So, Martijn grows strong but the prognosis is gloomy. Paradox doesn't really exist. We always hold opposites in the vessels of our hearts, minds and spirits. To enjoy light we must know darkness; to taste sweetness, we must know bitter. For today, I choose to water the seeds of lightness and sweetness, acknowledging that their counterparts, darkness and bitterness exist. Much love and peace, Suze



Allan Crimm, MD, in his Philadelphia office, May 2006



Dr. Maurice Bom, our hero

Treatment options

Mon Oct 15 02:50:00 CDT 2007 |

There is not instruction booklet on how to proceed in times like these. Having faith and asking questions are requisite. Here is a letter I received from my good friend, Dr. Allan Crimm. We are so grateful for this bit of encouragement. Martijn and I will follow up.

I have talked with 2 cancer specialists and have a call in to a 3rd person who I hope will call me back early this week.

Since Martijn has had spread of the cancer despite his initial treatment, it may be appropriate to have him take

further treatment once he is stronger and recovered from the surgery. The idea is that it may very well prevent the cancer from coming back or slow it's progression. The treatment would be a type of chemotherapy for which there is some evidence of efficacy in squamous cell cancer of the anus.

There are not large trials in people who have not responded to the type of initial combination of chemotherapy with 5-FU and radiation like Martijn had. However, most oncologist who specialize in GI cancers have seen other people like

Martijn and have found that selecting medications that have efficacy in fighting squamous cell cancer

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originating in other parts of the body (e.g. head and neck cancer) may help with this type of squamous cell cancer originating in the anus. The drugs that have been mentioned are Erbetux (which is a monoclonal antibody that affects a cancer stimulating growth factor) and Irinotecan (which is a chemotherapy medication).

Remember that the advice you received about no further treatment was from the cancer surgeon, not from a medical oncologist. Someone with the latter background would most likely discuss options similar to the ones I have outlined above. I recommend that you ask that the medical oncologist who has seen him before be consulted now AND ALSO make an apt to see someone in Amsterdam or Rotterdam – wherever the person is with the biggest experience with GI cancers of various types – including anal cancer. I hope this is useful to you.

*Sara and I send you our love,
Allan*



Martijn with Dorothe

Old Friends

Tue Oct 16 14:31:00 CDT 2007 |

Old friends brighten any day, but they really light us up when we're feeling a little under the weather. So a special two-day visit with Dorothe Hönes, a very dear friend of Martin's from the Stuttgart area of Germany brought a glow to his entire being.

Each day Martijn continues to gain strength. Tomorrow the doctors want to move him to a "regular" hospital bed, from the special sand and circulating airbed he's been in. Bigger step still will be doing just that - taking a step!! Tomorrow is also the day the physical therapist, who has been working each day with him, will try to get him at least to stand and take a step. To me, this would indeed be a big big step. What a scary yet thrilling idea after 21 full days on his back! I'd prefer to think that they'd first sit him up, but, let's see what happens.

Meanwhile, on the medical oncology front, other good friends from the German speaking part of Belgium are also looking into Dr. Crimm's suggestions about seeking medical chemotherapies. Martijn is obviously a strong and courageous man who has come through this brutal surgery with ease and grace to be admired. We've a long road to go yet, creator willing. As always, I am in total awe at the number of you who continue to send such love and positive wishes. When I think of my "old friends" like David Fey and Carol Malkinson who dropped all their other responsibilities to come lend their love and support, I become deeply moved. When I was a little "only" child I vowed to create a "global family" and this was well before the word global grew so trendy. Martijn and I are blessed with just such a global family that

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ripples ever-outward including friends of friends. We can indeed heal one another this way; perhaps we can also tap such astounding love to heal this world that at times seems as sick and frail as my dear beloved husband. If you continue to light a light for Martijn, then do so also for the pain of others. Maybe our circle will radiate in places we can't imagine. Peace, Suze



Martijn fully intended to become a volunteer in the Harry Bacon society to provide support for colostomy bag users. Here, Ger Brands, helps Martijn

The Big Step

Thu Oct 18 02:37:00 CDT 2007 |

WOW! One small step for Martijn is indeed a giant leap for humankind. What spunk, what spirit, what strength. After 21 days flat on his back, Martijn rises easily and readily to meet the challenge as these two dedicated nurses gently raise him from his new, regular hospital bed, ask him to take some deep (but not too deep) breaths, and walk him "off to the races". He experienced no dizziness or nausea, but reported that standing and walking felt like being on a ship. Indeed. Later, the physical therapist introduced a wheeled walker and Martijn took off for a few longer walks down the corridor. Again he surprises all of us.

Our new general practitioner, Dr. Maurice Bom, earlier in the day warned that Martijn could experience understandable weakness after his weight loss and such a long time without movement. It would be acceptable, he warned me, if the therapists only had him move a little by the bedside. But low and behold - my former distance runner and weightlifter was off to a very promising start.

Today a volunteer from the "Harry Bacon" society that provides support to new colostomy bag users stopped by for a visit. Ger Brands provided Martijn with more than information, he will be a "buddy" throughout the beginning stages as we get used to this new life companion - a bowel movement bag outside the body. A new room, a new bed, a new buddy, and new legs all in one day. These events give renewed spirit and determination that Martin's new journey is beginning. These beacons speak volumes about how his body is 'hearing' all of your support. In gratitude, Susan



Guests, wellness garden, happy moments, a disappointment

Sun Oct 21 18:06:00 CDT 2007 |

Top: Martijn with Merle and Sjoerd Soeters, Sunday, October 21, 2007, azM (Academic Hospital Maastricht)

Middle: Herman Rouw and Ton Schaap prepare a feast for Suze after a day of visiting Martijn at hospital, Friday, October 19, 2007

Below: After Ton and Herman help Susan purchase and transport plants, here is the resulting evergreen, winter healing garden to aid Martin's wellness when he returns home.

Today was one of those days that caught us off-guard. Somber reminders about what “progress” means in such circumstances. Martijn had literally hopped out of bed the other day and was off to the races as the video clip from the previous entry shows; somewhere with all this surprising forward movement there were the words of his surgeon warning that he could experience swelling in his legs from the drainage of lymph fluids. (He had been hooked up to a drainage system for his wounds for almost three weeks but those were removed earlier in the week.)

Martijn was off on one of his very long walks around the hospital showing off its mainly regional (and impressive) art collection to our dear friends, Sjoerd and Merle Soeters, who came to see us from Amsterdam. Just prior to taking this walk he mentioned to me that his thigh wound was swollen, (where the plastic surgeon removed his grisailles muscle and harvested some skin to transplant over his posterior amputation). I asked to see and didn't like the look of the swelling at all, but off he went showing his off not only the art collection and architecture of the hospital, but his spunk and resolve as well.

Unfortunately, the swelling was indeed pooled lymph fluid that he was warned about. By the time we got him back to his bed the wound sprouted like a fountain and when I left the hospital Martijn was laying unattended in a pool of this unsavory liquid. This wound which is over nine inches long had opened over an inch. I really didn't want to leave but Martijn insisted I go. I left with a sinking feeling about the incident – both the physical element and the almost total lack of medical care.

As always, Martijn bravely accepted what seemed to me like too little measures to address this situation. It took quite some time before the nursing staff finally cleaned his bed clothes and the wound, placing a colostomy bag over it to collect the fluids. This will be the solution he has to accept for the entire evening. To me it seems crude and rather unprofessional. At the best of times hospitals in the Netherlands are understaffed; the weekends make me cringe. Ironically, our new general practitioner, Dr. Bom, postponed Martijn's release from the hospital on Saturday, when he was originally scheduled. Thank goodness. I wouldn't have known at all how to handle this situation even though I'm not pleased with the hospital's treatment. I'm afraid of wound infection and who knows what else. Now we'll have to see what tomorrow brings.

One step forward, two steps back? Or two steps forward, one step back? I'm not sure how to read this but nevertheless, I feel Martijn is better off still in hospital and fingers crossed that this situation is readily treated. I intended to write happily about the round of anticipated guests who graciously visited with us this weekend, Ton Schaap and Herman Rouw, making a roundtrip from Amsterdam, on Friday returning Saturday and today the Soeters, but for the moment, this entry will have to suffice. I feel queasy in my tummy and very sad and tired. I realize that I cannot grow too dependent upon "progress", but how do I manage? What straw should I grasp? I'll try hard to remember my meditations and living for each moment, but as I'm not a zen master, this isn't always in my grasp.



Welcome home sign made by the three adorable triplets next door, with a little help from mom and dad, Monday, October 22nd, 2007

Heeee's BACK!!!

Mon Oct 22 14:58:00 CDT 2007 |

After a dreadful night for me, and a truly hectic morning "welcoming" the home care hospital bed delivery men early, and literally begging them to help me do a major furniture "redo" to accommodate the new hospital bed, followed by frantic phone calls back and forth between myself and Martijn due to the fact that he was being released by the hospital without transportation (or pajamas due to the leaking lymph fluid episode), and a mad dash with Marcel to pick him up, transport him home, followed by another mad dash to the supermarket, Martijn is HOME! The home care nurse almost decided NOT to come until Martijn insisted, and when she did, how glad we were since she seemed to actually know how to care for his newly opened stitches better than anyone on last night's hospital shift. In fact, she was great, as was her home care (Thuis Zorg) supervisor who was furious at the way Martijn was released from the hospital. Breathe, breathe, and breathe. I managed to make this strong, courageous man a terrific lunch and actually cooked up an inspired dinner for him, mother and Marcel as well. Just after finishing in whisked my personal guardian angel, Barbara Greenberg with her trademark chocolate tort to make the night complete. Heeee's Back, we snuggled, it's a thoroughly better day. I remain exhausted but now deeply happy. One day at a time. Thanks to all of you who wrote reminding me to take care of myself. I do, I really do, but today's marathon was necessary and satisfying. A really good evening to you. Smile on my tired face, Suzie



Home care nurses try to deal with a large oozing wound

Not out of the water

Tue Oct 23 14:39:00 CDT 2007 |

At home, October 23, 2007. The wound is getting larger, and we spent most of the day trying to address what I feel is a dangerous problem. I think Martijn should not have been released from the hospital given the fact that what was a well healing scar suddenly opened leaking lymph fluid. Though he has no fever, the wound looks pus-filled now, and as good as these home care nurses are I don't understand why a wound specialist hasn't been called. I worked non-stop today, literally from 9 to 9, cooking and cleaning linens and bed clothing. Tomorrow our general practitioner will call early and supposedly come by. This situation is both frightening and I think unnecessary. We try to keep our spirits up but I'm not a nurse and I feel rather scared by how this is going.



The Art of Mindful Living

Wed Oct 24 15:34:00 CDT 2007 |

Born in central Vietnam in 1926, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (called *Thầy* by his students) is one of the best known and most respected Zen masters in the world today, as well as a poet, and peace and human rights activist. Two of our best friends, David Fey and Ursula Glunk, who have been noted on this site previously, introduced me to his teachings. Last week, in the midst of my most stressful period, David gifted me with an simple yet powerful CD set of his teachings, entitled 'The Art of Mindful Living', and Ursula almost simultaneously presented us with a lovely video. This morning, after the tension of this week, (or perhaps I should say of the past four months), I sat perfectly still listening to his 'satsong' and practicing his meditations in the beauty of our home. The strength and grounding of this exercise carried me through the day. Martijn was able to listen to some of the CD and wants to meditate together once we can coordinate this.

Coordination is a keyword of today. It seems that finally, the home care and the hospital have been miraculously pulled into coordination by our own Zen like general practitioner, Dr. Maurice Bom. While home care team has struggled valiantly with this leaking wound situation, they simply are not trained or specialized enough. Today one of the supervisors, Raymond, visited for the second time. Dr. Bom came for a home visit (yes dear American friends, they do this here) and suggested that I photograph the wound and email the images to our surgeon, Dr. Keymeulen. He also ordered a saner dressing system for the wound which I applied myself, simply clean sterile gauze with some wetness barrier. Later in the day Dr. Keymeulen and Dr. Bom rang up to say that Martijn will be examined at the hospital tomorrow - a relief. Dr. Bom assured us his office is available 24/7 through its emergency number as is the home care team!

I took time to run errands in our neighborhood dealing with thermometers, soothing teas, nutritious juices and a special waste bin for the medical refuse we're piling up. Martin's sister Elly, brother-in-law, Paul, nephew Jony and niece Jolieke paid a visit. Sadly when they came a surge of exhaustion overtook me and I wasn't very hospitable I'm afraid. The healthcare system also delivered Martijn a large supply of 'nutridrinks' to help him gain much needed weight.

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He's down to 58 kilograms which is a shocking 128 pounds on his almost 6 foot frame.

Since Monday I have been preparing nutritious and fattening meals three times a day with 'inbetweeners' thrown in. This morning Martijn took a hand in the kitchen (he has too much energy!) and cooked his own oatmeal, accompanied by a huge hunk of ginger spice bread liberally spread with butter. Yes, right now he can eat whatever his little heart desires in spite of the many (and conflicting) ideas about vegan, vegetarian, blah blah cancer diets. At the moment high calories AND nutrition are the orders of the day. Lunch was leftovers from last night's dinner of turkey cutlets dredged in yogurt and lemon, breaded and sautéed in olive oil, mashed potatoes and spinach with a nutridrink. Dinner was spinach tortellinis with tomato sauce and cheese and a large fresh salad with homemade guacamole and a piece of Barbara's sinful chocolate cake smothered in homemade whipped cream with cane sugar and fresh vanilla bean. Naturally I'll gain all the weight!

Today my good buddy Barbara Craig, of Philadelphia, who herself has had this criminal anal cancer, asked what I wanted and she's sending me a case of Barbara's Natural Oat cereal which we devour most mornings and is not available here; dear friend Sally Eves, also from Pennsylvania, wants to purchase another evergreen for our healing garden to represent her and her loving furry family of kitties and a pooch named Dusty. This weekend our wonderful friends Christiane Schneider and Thomas Vieten, of Eupen, Belgium, are descending upon us with a pre-made healthy feast. And Marion (of Jang and Marion of Apeldoorn) will plan to come by at some point to help with cooking, cleaning, piano playing or storytelling. Friends here like Casey O'Dell, Claudia Vaz, Barbara Greenberg, Audrey Sondeijker and Johanna Martinez have already come with food and friendship; Frank Koeckebakker and Martin's brother Janus have supplied countless DVDs, and Jacqueline Braun with lots of love and friendship.

Back stateside the messages from Suzanne Kochevar and Rich Heck, Theo Jolosky, Carol Malkinson and Dave Hyde, Rosalind Miller, Heinz Brummel, Paul and Libby Scheele, Suzy Queen, Kathy Tait and Bill Valentine, my cousin Hannah Williams, Michael Putman, dik and Carmen Bolger, and my wonderful classmates from Philadelphia High School for Girls, Class 211 of 1967, friends from Spiral Dynamics have kept me sane and supported. My dear, ex-husband Bob provides wonderful short stories to read, Anne McQuinn continues to light lights. Across Europe friends like our sweet Irena Zagajšek, Ankica Kotic, Krista Knopper, Ingrid Regout and other friends and colleagues from the University of Maastricht perform countless kindnesses for us. If I missed mentioning you, I apologize. Our cup runneth over and we are grateful that you continue filling it. Martijn and I hope to begin to radiate back out; so many of you have your own ordeals, your own friends and family who are suffering or in pain. We hope to provide encouragement, inspiration and loving traditions that support you and yours even as we continue on our own perilous journey.

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Tonight we had a romantic meal and settled, for one brief shining moment, into our cozy living room for the delicious pleasure of simply watching television TOGETHER. Your prayers, meditations, wishes and gestures have made this spot of simple pleasure possible. From the bottom of our hearts we thank you and hope you can all heal along with us. In peace, Suze



Old wounds and new opened and closed

Thu Oct 25 17:32:00 CDT 2007 |

Martin's brother, Janus, Leiven, Irma and 'Tjeu Hermse, December 2005. Today Marcel drove us to the hospital where both Martijn's surgeon's looked at the wound and decided on the spot to operate, reinserting a lymph drain and stitching the wound up again. Now we have to hope for no infection, and no abscess, but everyone feels this was a better solution than having an oozing, open wound at home.

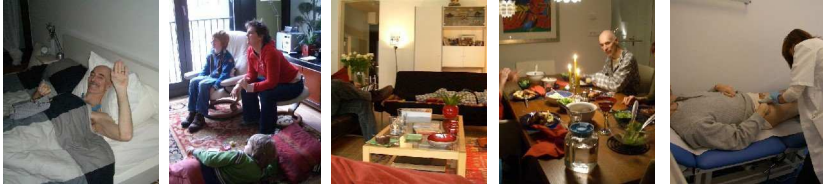
But today I had a serious meltdown. We returned from the hospital and I began to prepare a nice meal, which actually relaxes and pleases me. But, just before serving dinner our good friends Maurice Schoffelen and Olena Breyman came by with a lovely homemade cake. During the conversation with them I felt Martijn was complaining about how I was handling the entire situation. That I got too stressed, etc. I found that I couldn't handle what I perceived as any criticism.

After our dinner, I hit the bottom. I called Martijn's brother, Janus, who is in town staying at Martin's mother's house, with his wife Irma and sons, 'Tjeu and Leiven, who are on fall holidays. Maybe one more trip to the hospital or

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suddenly being partially responsible for caring for Martijn's new wound drain pushed me over the top. I felt scared, trapped and angry at Martijn for what I perceive is a lack of compassion back for me and my multiple responsibilities. There it is, I felt terribly unappreciated. I suppose this sounds selfish, but it is what it is. Janus and Irma came immediately. Jan and I had a long and good talk and it turns out he and Irma had already agreed that he would travel from Amersfoort, (near Amsterdam which is about 2 1/2 hours away), to provide me 'relief' one day a week. He has already discussed this with his supervisor at work as well. This feels very supportive. I am overcome by gratitude. Later, I went out for a needed walk along the River Meuse with Irma and then for a drink at a nice nearby café. Irma herself had a bout with cancer a few years back and she and Janus understand the dynamics and pressures that illness put on a relationship. Irma was kind enough to admit that she felt my situation was even more stressful, with my dealing with Martijn's grim prognosis, severity of the surgery he's undergone, a different language, culture and healthcare system, not to mention not working, no income and increased expenses.

I also called our Minnesota financial planner, Darrell Norling, to discuss cashing in Martijn's small 'retirement' account that I'd set up and funded for him. With his current disability we can do this without incurring a penalty and frankly, we need the funds. If possible next week I'd like to approach my client, the city of Maastricht, to see if I can begin a small project that they hired me for. I really need to work again for my own mental health. Old wounds and new opened and closed.
Love, Suze



Family, Food, Friendship and Patterns

Fri Oct 26 16:19:00 CDT 2007 |

Back to beddy! Here's himself waving as he settles into our own bed. Tonight we're going "whole hog" - an attempt to see if we can sleep in our own 'beddy' together for the first time in a month! Hopefully I won't roll over on the precious lymph wound drain detaching it! Friday evening, October 26, 2007.

My sister-in-law Irma and the boys watching a Wallace and Gromit flick this afternoon at our home (second from left). Brother-in-law Janus and Martijn chat easily today.

Family and friends rallied around us today. First, we began with a trial snuggle in our own bed this morning, followed by a nice breakfast together and time out to listen to our Thich Nhat Hanh cd. By the time the morning Home Nurse arrived I was out the door to walk two short blocks to shop for ample supplies at our local grocery, Albert Hein. I stocked up more than usual as I now fear disruptions that could keep me from my otherwise 'daily' shopping trips. I picked up two nice DVDs - Wallace and Gromit meet the Werewolf and Old Yeller, as little gifts for our nephews, 'Tjeu [Chauw] and Leiven [Lee-va]. Jan and Irma and the boys stayed for lunch and a film. Then, Irma headed back to Amersfoort and Jan stayed on to watch a Russian opera with Martijn. Thankfully I fled this racket to shop for stainless steel pans - no more teflon or aluminum as they are considered counter indicative for cancer in some circles. Later in the day I cooked up a tofu/turkey stir fry with baked yams - pretty yummy. One of our favorite Home Care nurses, Sylvie, came to empty the drain and change Martin's colostomy bag. He has a slight irritation around that wound, but Sylvie said it wasn't too serious. Martijn has changed his own bag a few times now and seems to have easily adapted to life with his fancy, soft, flesh colored bags. They are so different from the bad old days of bulky plastic. Our "stoma" nurse explained there are over 200 varieties here in the Netherlands. Martijn is using a rather small size which is very discreet and he says entirely comfortable.

We managed another cozy evening alone after dinner and the nurse. I enjoyed two long conversations today with old dear friends. I rang up Leslie Mogul in Escondido, California to learn, thankfully, that she and her family survived the terrible fires. She gave a rather grim report of conditions in her neighborhood

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and I enquired after the animals in the famous Safari Park, a place where Leslie, her hubby Bill, Martijn and I enjoyed many times together. Only two animals perished, she reported. Her mother, Elaine, another dear friend, also fared okay during this horrifying period. We wish all our friends in that region good luck as the drought continues.

Sally Eves and I also had one of our frequent great, long conversations. Shown here with my other good buddy, Barbara Craig (at her Philly home in May 2006), Sally and I go way, way back. We've been friends since about 1969, so you can do the math. There's really nothing like the ease of talking to such old friends. We share so much history. Sally lives in her childhood family homestead in the mountains of Pennsylvania near Bloomsburg with her menagerie of three kitties, Midnight, Buttercup and Sam, plus Dusty the Dog. Sam is famous for writing a 12-page letter to humor Martijn during his hospital recovery. It was truly amazing how his 'pawwriting' resembled Sally's! Barbara also has been calling a few times a week to check in and send loads of support as well. Davy Fey and Michael Putman called too, but we missed them. Bob Ingram has been sharing some particularly touching insights with me via email, and Kate Tasch has recently shared her invaluable perspective regarding being the caretaker. When her partner Michelle valiantly battled leukemia Kate was there every step of the way, so she knows these ropes very well. David Meyers has been in constant touch and the notes from his wife, Roberta are soothing and welcomed. Allan Crimm and his wife Sara, as always, continue to help us with medical and emotional intelligence. So, I got a good "American" fix today to sit nicely next to our European support.

Time to join the frog and see if we can make our bed a dreamy lily pad. Good night and ribbit, ribbit, ribbit to you. Suze



Kitchen Magic

Sat Oct 27 17:54:00 CDT 2007 |

Left: Christiane and Thomas create magic in the kitchen to aid Martin's health and healing, Saturday evening, October 27, 2007.

Christiane bagged the rice while Thomas sips the sauce! Even after two helpings Martijn eyes Christiane's portion! It was a very good day - quiet for the most part with the now ritual Home Care Nurses visit at around 9 followed by breakfast like we used have. Best of all, we slept together last night for the first time in a month . I was very moved to awaken with Martijn beside me. We snuggled and ribbited a lot and "slept in" until 8:30. After the nurse left we had a communal "sponge bath" with me lathering Martijn up and wiping him down, then jumping into my own steamy hot shower. A shave completed the ritual and we rested for a while. Next came our new physical therapist, Enika, who put Martijn through a few light exercises.

At 3 Christiane Schneider and Thomas Veiten arrived with box loads of prepared food. They truly performed kitchen magic and we feasted and spent an enchanted evening with one little break for the night nurse. Sleep tight and keep love in your heart and a song on your lips for there are many acts of kindness in this world. Tonight one came to us. Love and kisses, Susan



Home One Week

Mon Oct 29 17:05:00 CDT 2007 |

Left: Irena Zagajšek and Martijn at the European Parliament, April 3, 2006.

Martijn has been home for one week. Despite the sudden surgery last Thursday to close his thigh wound and reinsert the drain to collect lymph fluid, we both feel that much progress has been made. Today Dr. Maurice Bom, our general practitioner stopped by for a check up. He commented that Martijn looks particularly strong, noticeably better than a week ago. Hugging him in bed, I feel he's put on a little weight, one of the most critical aspects to his healing at this point. Certainly his personality is back on track - he's filled with his old vim and vigor, joking (and also finding

fault) easily - a good sign.

I'm aware of the full range of emotions around this entire situation. I am grateful to have this precious time together, now with a bit more rhythm to it. I am practicing living in the present moment and trying to understand that, in fact, that is all we have. But I'm also concerned for the future, a very natural reaction to all the information we've received concerning the cancer and its possible trajectory. A big part of me wants to believe that the progress Martijn is making is a sure signal - a marker for a return to our happy life together. Another part sits on the other shoulder whispering 'be aware, be realistic, enjoy this now but don't get too happy, too comfortable!' Yet another portion of my being wants to begin to live again - to work, to go to a film, to dance, to simply feel the rain on my skin and Martin's arm about me as we stroll through this medieval town I've grown to love.

So, life is a mixed bag, as it is for most everyone. But my bag has the tiniest hole in it where crumbs fall through leaving a subtle trail as a reminder of how precious life is. When I do the laundry, clean the house, shop for groceries, cook our meals, I keep this hyperawareness and try to enjoy each detail in crystal sharp relief. Tomorrow, Wednesday and Thursday we have appointments with a range of hospital professionals: the oncologic surgeons, the plastic surgeon, our wonderful social worker, the physical therapist, as well as the twice daily visits from the Home Nursing Team (Green Cross). These details remind us that life is a journey and we are only travelers. May all your journeys be meaningful and sweet, Suze



Day at the Maastrto Clinic for Cancer Treatment

Tue Oct 30 10:56:00 CDT 2007 |

Marcel graciously drives Martijn and Suze to the Maastrto Clinic for Cancer Treatment, adjacent to the azM (Academic Hospital Maastricht) for a follow-up visit to check the lymph drain inserted last Thursday. Tuesday, October 30, 2007 Dr. K.B.I.M. Keymeulen decides Martijn needs extra stitches to close the little wound where the drain is inserted. A leaking wound invites bacteria and, as she prefers the drain to stay put, she wants a nice dry wound there. Another surgeon comes to stitch him up.



Multi-tasking to make our trip more functional, *Susan meets with our angel of social work (Medish Maatschappelijk Werk), Tine Peters. Tine [Teen-a], has been a gift to us.* She aided Martijn to register for insurance coverage when my policy by the *#!**# (obscenities) Lippman Group decided to kick him out!! I haven't written about this fiasco in the blog since my priorities have been appropriately focused on Martin's health and healing. But I assure you I will tell the story in most journalistic fashion shortly. Now Tine is helping me to transfer from this odious company so that we will both be insured properly. Did I mention that Lippman decided to kick me out and called to tell me this when Martijn was in the operating room during his second critical surgery?!? More to come, but suffice it to say that to us, Tina is an actual angel.



Here is Dr. J. Buijsen, our oncologic radiologist (radiotherapeut-oncoloog). We dropped in to see him since we were back in the Maastricht Clinic where he treated Martijn initially with the chemo-radiation protocol. In fact, today we picked up the medical records so that we can begin to move forward with the next steps, whatever they may be.

Our experience is that Dr. Keymeulen and Dr. Buijsen are incredibly open to working together with us to explore options. In fact, Dr. Buijsen is off to Houston in a few weeks to explore state-of-the-art cancer treatments stateside. I hope to work with all of our medical specialists to develop a sane and robust follow-up protocol for Martijn.

It's been a busy but productive day. We also stopped by Martin's hospital nursing floor to give a gift of Maastricht's tastiest 'bon bons' to our wonderful nursing staff. Tomorrow we must return to the hospital side for a consult with the plastic surgeon and the colostomy nurse specialist.



Heinz Builds A Yurt named Earth Ship Martijn

Wed Oct 31 15:44:00 CDT 2007 |

Martijn and Heinz, Maastricht, September 2005
Heinz's Yurt going up in his South Minneapolis backyard, September 2007.



Today may be Halloween but this is not a ruse like Orson Well's 'War of the Worlds'. It is however a welcome departure from hospital trips and other otherworldly goings on. You see, our dear friend, who we think is from Mars (and who dates a lovely lady from Venus), and who makes world-class jewelry, decided to build himself a yurt in his backyard, which happens to be on the planet Minnesota. Anyway, inspired by Martin's brave launch into what we could consider his 'second orbit' on this planet, earth that is, Heinz decided to 'christen' (please forgive the religious reference) his whimsical and colorful (like Martijn) yurt, 'the E.S. Martijn'. Below is a note from Heinz to us from September this year. It tells the tale in his own words.

P.S. Martijn and I hope you all have a happy haunting today! May you have no tricks and all your treats be sweet.

Dearest Susy....and Martijn....

Am still monitoring your conditions...

Your thoughts are moving...bittersweet and profound. They make me blink and swallow a bit. They are reminder...a gift... to all of us, who at this moment, just "happen " to be well, to never take anything for granted.

Working hard on the "E.S. Martijn". It's christening will take place at my open house the first week in december. Look see.....and I hope that you can show these images to the courageous King.

Signing off will love, Heinzo

PS. E.S. stands for "earthship".



Release

Thu Nov 01 10:28:00 CDT 2007 |

Martin's new physical therapist Ineke van den Bosch performs a release therapy for Martin's spine to help open up the lung area.



At home, Thursday, November 1, 2007

Ineke and Maurice, our physical therapist and general practitioner, visiting our home today.

Today was a release day. Both Martijn and I experienced some release. We didn't have to rush through the morning and we didn't have to go to the hospital. My release was feeling 'normal' and happy. I managed a relaxing hot bath topped off with my regular 'in tub' meditation, then did the groceries at nearby Albert Hein supermarket where I ran into my friend and colleague, Sophie Vanhoonacker, who was director of the University of Maastricht European Public Affairs Masters Programme when I originally applied. It's always so nice to see and speak to Sophie. After lunch, Doc Maurice stopped by and I received my flu shot sitting at our own dining room table! Although he is primarily here to visit Martijn I enjoyed a big release not having to travel to his office. We had a lively discussion of Dutch health care and I'm going to try to work with him to promote some ideas he has to improve public health policy. In the late afternoon I dropped off our glass recycling in the containers provided around the city and found a reasonably priced bicycle for me that I bought. I've had a very poor quality used 'fiets' and wanted a better bike so that I can make use of our wonderful Dutch bikeways more.

Martijn, too, seemed to be released for a while from the exhaustion and frustration of the hospital clinic visits. Ineke worked wonders with him. He made his own breakfast and lunch, enjoying very much his improved mobility and stamina. Tonight will be another quiet evening. I'm preparing spinach pasta with vegetarian 'meat' balls, red sauce with zucchini and salad with sun-dried tomatoes.

People have been asking how I'm caring for myself. My friend, Carol Malkinson, whose presence was so comforting to me during Martijn's hospital stay, sent an email about book on caregiving she read while caring for her mom aptly called "The 36-hour Day." The 36-hour day truly reflects

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what it feels like. But, I have some tricks rather like the advice given to parents regarding airline safety measures: When the oxygen masks fall, warn the airline hosts, parents should first apply their own mask before helping their child. The logic is rather simple: If you are out of air you can't help anyone else. So, each day during this first critical phase of Martijn's surgery and recovery I made sure to take a refreshing bath or shower and to meditate, even if for a very short time. Except when Martijn's condition was truly critical, I also made sure to apply my minimal makeup and wear nice clothing. In other words, even when I was truly stressed and exhausted I took some time to try to be normal. When he began to improve, I improved my rituals, taking a longer breakfast and walking to the hospital when I could. Writing this blog is also therapeutic for me – I process what's happening while practicing my main talent – writing and messing about with photography, mini-videos and keeping fresh with computer skills entailed in blogging itself. At night, I now try to have quality quiet time alone with Martijn, making up for the scary, lonely month apart. And, I have a quiet, private prayer ritual I practice every night and have since I was a small child. All of this feeds me, feeds my soul – releases me.

Next steps, if Martijn continues to improve, will be to work again. I really miss consulting, coaching analyzing, planning and collaborating with colleagues and clients. The simple truth is, I enjoy problem solving and contributing my skills and talents to something meaningful. Meanwhile, sharing thoughts with you has filled in a small portion of this need, and being there for Martijn is by far the greatest contribution I think I can ever make, as is his contribution back to me. Without his valor his courage and even his 'piss and vinegar' I simply would be unable to participate in this healing journey. He is my coach and collaborator, and for now, I'm pretty lucky.

Touch

Fri Nov 02 13:38:00 CDT 2007 |

Touch is vital to healing. Much has been written about the effect of touch upon infants, the elderly and the infirm. We all need touch yet too often in our society we've been removed from access to safe, pure, affectionate touch. Martijn and I snuggle, cuddle and pet frequently. I was raised in an affectionate household.

Today I got an extra dose of touch by being with Hassna Nouisri, my most affectionate and capable skin care practitioner who has recently moved to our local Aveda Salon. It was pure heaven. Hassna [Assh-NA] provides more than a facial - she ministers to skin and soul with her gentle, caring professionalism. When I left I was glowing from top to bottom.

After lunch it was Martin's turn as our angel of healing touch, Gerry Hartmayer (please see Thursday, October 24th entry on this blog) and her friend and colleague, Charlotte Roozemonde, once again worked with Martijn from the

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spiritual down to the cellular level. Today they focused on his lymph system as well as his spine and bum, which, as you can imagine, is tight and sore. Gerry asked if they could return tomorrow. We are very fortunate and blessed by their nurture and care. Remember, we all need touch. If you're currently not in a relationship that provides this, please find ways to bring touch into your life. Ask for platonic hugs from family or friends or find a good masseuse. Here's a virtual hug your way from your flatland friends. Hug, hug, S&M



Steph & Snoepje Serendipity

Sat Nov 03 14:11:00 CDT 2007 |

Stephanie Cunningham, the wonderful foster mother of our beloved cat, Snoepje van de Weg, Rosa Neus, Papa John. And, the many faces of Miz Schnoopees!



Dearest Animal lovers and psychics. Today Martijn received Part Two of Gerry Hartmayer's Healing Touch session. It was a very very moving, open, loving, intense and successful interlude. During the session and at its conclusion, Gerry gently reminded Martijn about "calling to him" all the healing spirits around the world who have been with us and continue to be with us during this journey. Gerry asked Martijn if he had one particular spirit accompanying him. "Yes," he replied, pointing to a portrait on one of our bookshelves, "Snoepje, our beloved cat." Gerry then inquired more about Snoepje, so I explained how it came to be that she is now living in what I call "Cat Heaven" with Stephanie Cunningham in Minnesota. Low and behold, after Gerry departed our home, I received the following email. Serendipity or pure connectedness...does it really matter?



*Dearest Susan & Martijn,
I hope this finds you both enjoying a wonderful, rest-filled weekend together. I want to thank you for keeping so many of us informed and up-to-date on your astounding journey.*



The blog, Susan, is a beautiful testament to staying connected in a very intimate, soulful way, with those who love us. Your prose and thought process many times, have been moving and eye-opening for me. I am in awe of your writing skills - just so lovely and articulate. And as you say, writing can be a type of therapy, a releasing, a flushing out of emotions and energy that could keep us stuck in some way. Your writing is a great gift and I thank you for sharing it with your global network.

Martijn, what to say to someone who is living with such a challenge? It truly is an inspiration; perhaps a call to the rest of us to wake up and be ever-so present to each day. And not take each day nor our health for granted. I found myself cringing reading about some of the hospital and medical struggles you've both been enduring. I can empathize with that portion of your journey. It brings up many experiences I (with my parents) had as a child in dealing with the medical model. Thank goodness there are

those who work within this rigid system, that are truly caring, healing souls meant to assist us through the crazy painful and outright infuriating times.

And to the both of you, I'm very moved by the connection I feel with you, even though in reality, we don't know each other. Snoepje was/is our connection - lifeline, one could say. I think about how we literally spent what, perhaps an hour and half together over a year ago? Meeting as strangers who together love this furry-demanding-funny-weird-beautiful little being (and let's not forget his holiness, Mr. Yin (the Buddha in fur). It's quite remarkable I think. And so, now the two of you are going through this horrendous, yet grace-filled challenge. By documenting and sharing your process, I am allowed to get to know you in a very intimate way. I wanted to thank you for that. So my tiny gift to you, is this link to some recent photos I took of your sweetpea. Know that some are out of focus, others not so good, but there a few that are nice, I think. (I was using my brother's camera - my first foray into digital technology - it's so different from using my "old" 35mm film cameras). I hope you find a few shots here of the girly-girl that you like and could print out.

I've been keeping Snoepje current on how you both are doing. I've tried to show her the photos of Papa, but as you can guess, she's not much for being held in front of a computer screen for very long. But I know she's continuing to send you much Schnoops-Love, nuzzles and meows. I tell how much her mama & papa would love having her near, so she could help in healing Papa's wounds. Laying on his chest, purring away while perhaps suckling on his shirt - what's better than that? No medicine or procedure I know of! I guess you will have to settle for receiving it all on the astral.

So, know you are being held in our prayers and thoughts on a daily basis. Continue to keep on, keeping on, as they say. Well, probably not in Netherlands, but you know us Mini-soow-tans. Much love and blessings to you two,

xxxooo

--Steph & Snoepje

Gezellig

Sun Nov 04 14:48:00 CST 2007 |



Ingrid Regout at my graduation from the European Public Affairs Masters Programme, Maastricht, June 30, 2005.

Ingrid Regout was the very first person I made contact with when I applied for the Masters in European Public Affairs Programme here in Maastricht. At that time Ingrid was the executive administrator of the programme. She took care of all of us in a personal and professional manner. Martijn and I have been fortunate to grow a friendship with Ingrid during the following years and tonight she came to us creating an evening at our home that has to be called "gezellig" a very Dutch word for which no translation suffices.

The closest you come in English is "cozy", but gezellig is so much more than that. Ingrid has inner warmth wrapped in a direct and honest exterior that creates its own unique ambiance, and this evening she also brought along all the fixings for an honest Maastricht meal - homemade zucchini soup with tomato 'torte'. I prepared a fresh salad and our trusty 'Mr. Albert Hein' came through with a delicious apple pie. To top off this perfect autumn evening we got to belly laugh the calories away by watching "The Full Monty". (Soon Martijn hopes to be able to dance like these guys and expose all the lovely work rendered by his surgeons!)

With Martin's mobility still limited by the drainage tube dangling from his right thigh, it's important for us to have nights 'out' that are 'in'. And when they are made gezellig by excellent company, food and some levity, time passes cozily and quickly. Hope your autumn stays cozy, Susan



Calling All Angels 1

Mon Nov 05 10:46:00 CST 2007 |

We got angels. If you don't know this haunting and lovely song by Jane Siberry with k.d.lang, find it, listen and love it.

Calling All Angels

Santa Maria, Santa Teresa, Santa Anna, Santa Susannah

Santa Cecilia, Santa Copelia, Santa Domenica, Mary Angelica

Frater Achad, Frater Pietro, Julianus, Petronilla

we're lovin'

we're cryin'

we're callin'

'cause we're not sure how this goes

Here are some of our angels:

Marion and Marieke

Jang

Jacqueline

Casey and Jerome

Me & Cousin Hannah

Dinner Party at dik and Carmen's, St. Paul, MN, 2005: Scott, Carmen, Tom, Anne, Monica, John, Theresa, Martijn, Claudia, dik, Tessa, me squatting.

Barbara Lukermann, Seward Café, Minneapolis, MN 2005

Brunch at Claudia's, River Road, Seward Neighborhood, Minneapolis, MN, 2006: Standing: Martijn, Michal, Michael, Rich; Seated top: Tim, David, Claudia, Brant; Seated bottom: Suzanne, me, Diane

Leslie and Me, Spiral Dynamics Certification Workshop, Santa Barbara, California, 2006

Martijn, me and Lorcan, Dublin, Ireland, 2005



Calling All Angels 2

Tue Nov 06 15:17:00 CST 2007 |

Martijn had a quiet mostly good day. His thigh wound is healing nicely. He called his primary surgeon to ask when the stitches could be removed and she told him this Friday when he sees her in the morning. Tomorrow he has a hospital visit with his plastic surgeon. Top of the menu are questions regarding how he can begin to use his entirely reconstructed ass. So far he is only allowed to sit for 15 minutes of every two or so hours. It's very uncomfortable.

His new bum was surgically made from the muscle and skin from his thigh (where the wound is taking longer to heal) and fat from his stomach (because they removed so much of his posterior including a part of his spine). It's easy to understand why it is so difficult for him to sit, yes? But, I have a birds, well, maybe a cat's eye view of this new part of his body and without prejudice I attest it's beautiful. Really, incredibly gorgeous. His plastic surgeon, Dr. Sawlor, can do my face lift any time. Now, you'll never see this result here, so you have to believe that since I've been entirely honest in all I've written here, you couldn't believe Martijn had surgery, and such extensive surgery, by looking at that cute new bum! Martijn seems to be a natural self-healer, so please keep your prayers, meditations and candles going that the cancer will also never be invited back into any of his precious cells. And, here are more of you angels, keeping the light lit that this is so.

A part of the members (and some of their partners) of my University of Maastricht European Public Affairs Masters Programme during a little reunion in May 2006 on the roof terrace of our former apartment in Maastricht.

Libby and Paul Scheele, Maastricht, September 2007

Bob Ingram, "Down the Shore", Wildwood, New Jersey, May 2006.

Yulan San, Maastricht, summer 2006.



Calling All Angels 3 - Sweet Simone

Wed Nov 07 09:33:00 CST 2007 |

This morning I visited one of my favorite angels (who masquerades as a human walking on earth). Her name is Simone Peerdeman and she has manifested herself in this lifetime as a shiatsu massage therapist. Oh, but she's much more. Simone has been able to reach deep inside my weary body to infuse it with light. It is perhaps natural that I have absorbed much of the impact of what has happened to Martijn. The two of us share a very deep connection. I'm trying to make sure that as Martijn receives his healing treatments, both medical and 'alternative', I also take good care of myself. Simone is my primary source for that. And isn't it delightfully coincidental that one of her main modalities is shiatsu, precisely what Martijn practiced in Minneapolis.

As I had my treatment today by Simone, Martijn, at the hospital for an appointment, received good news from the plastic surgeon - he feels that all the surgeries are healing very well and encouraged Martijn to begin sitting more often. He also explained that the tightness in his bum should eventually begin to soften. Earlier, a home care nurse specially sent by his oncologic surgeon, Dr. Keymeulen, and trained specifically in this area, successfully dealt with the drainage tube issue. She taught Martijn how to get out the kinks in the tube.

So today both of us got the kinks out! A happy result indeed. More angels to come so dust off your wings and soar. If you have good health today - it's a great day. Yours truly, formerly kinky Suze.



Here I am, La Carnivala 2007

Carnival, Sinta Klaas and Our Helpers

Thu Nov 08 16:07:00 CST 2007 |

The city will have its official Carnival Kickoff this Sunday. As always it occurs at 11:11 on 11/11 in the Vrijthof, the main square. Maastricht goes wild. Today there were signs of this momentous event everywhere mixed in with storefronts preparing for Sinta Klaas. The name Santa Claus comes from Sinta Klaas, which is the Dutch version of Saint Nicholas. He was a bishop who lived in Myra (in Turkey) and was famous for his generosity. In the Middle Ages he became the patron saint of children. He died on December 6, 310. As a result St. Nicholas's Day takes place on that date and in Europe many children get gifts. This is great news for Santa and his helpers because it spreads out the delivery period of gifts.

Today I needed and found a few "helpers" whose mere presence were gifts. Martijn, thankfully, had a good day. Mine went awry from the beginning. First thing, all I wanted was a hot bath. NO WATER! This wasn't a good sign. Then, I purchased the wrong sized duvet cover and had to return it. What's the biggie, you may ask? I walk everywhere and the shops are a mile away - so two round trips mean 4 miles. Then I discovered the €9 sweater I found on the return trip had a hole in it. This meant another round trip to the shop! However, as my mood plummeted (since Martin's illness my moods are easily swayed) I ran into a new friend who suggested we have a coffee. We shared an easy conversation and my spirits were restored.

Then, on my third errand of the day, another good friend, Audrey, accompanied me, this time to post some orders for Martin's nutri drinks. The post office is a half-mile away. Audrey also offered a coffee, so we chose a nice cafe located right on the River Maas where we sipped, chatted and watched the low but friendly clouds that give the Netherlands its other name - "The Low Sky Country."

When I finally returned home to tend to regular household administration, I discovered that my recent US wire transfer to our Dutch account hadn't gone through. Aiyee! No water, wrong bedcover, damaged new sweater, no money, necessary nutritional drinks - it all felt rather BIG. Better than any Santa helper yet another good friend, Kay Dixon from TCF bank in Minneapolis, came to the rescue, tracking down what happened. The story hasn't ended (since the error seems to be at this end) but at least another angel is at my back when I really needed her wind beneath my wings. Hopefully the situation will be resolved tomorrow, along, fingers crossed, with Martin's thigh wound and lymph drainage issues. We're hoping for stitches and drainage tubes out and funds in.

The evening ended with a visit from two more lovely ladies, both of whom I've met through the International Women's Club of South Limburg. Shilly Lion is originally from Kerala, India, but has lived in the Netherlands most of her life. Her apartment sits literally across from ours so that when we chat on the phone we can wave. Shilly brought along Ellen, who is originally from Indonesia, but lived and raised her family in California before relocating back to the Netherlands. Her husband, who recently passed away from ALS, was from Maastricht and now she's settled here. Martijn and I were charmed by our evening company and wish you a cozy night. Sweet dreams from the land of Carnival and Sinta Klaas.



Past, present, future - NOW

Sun Nov 11 07:19:00 CST 2007 |

PAST

Here's Ursula Glunk and Krista Knopper, 'In 't Knijpke' cafe, Maastricht, December 2006. I met Krista back when she was the tutor for 'making presentations' in my EPA Master's Programme. Since then she has become a good friend, introducing me to Ursula and others, and trying her best to help me network and navigate in the arcane corners of the University of Maastricht. Yesterday she brought her own brand of sunshine along with sunflowers to brighten our day before she heads out for a four-week exchange mission on behalf of the University to Vietnam and India.



My brother, Allen Schaefer, café on Walnut Street, Philadelphia, May 2006. Allen is my half-brother, son of my father's first marriage. Well after Allen's mother died my dad met and married my mom, Emma. Allen is 23 years my senior, and recently relocated to Allentown to be closer to his son, Roy, after living most of his life in Willingboro, New Jersey. We keep in touch via the internet. This photo was taken last year when Allen graciously agreed to spend a few hours together during my job-hunting trip to Philly.

PRESENT: Martijn continues making progress. This past Friday his surgeons decided not to remove the stitches from the large wound on his thigh (where they took his grisailles muscle) or the drainage tube that keeps his lymph system from backing up causing edema (that last time caused the nicely healing thigh wound to split open). However, the surgeons seemed optimistic that the wound is healing nicely again and expect to remove the drainage system next week. (There is always increased danger of infection when you have a tube coming in that can also let in infection. So while the drainage helps prevent the dreaded side effect of edema from occurring, which is well known to those who have experienced breast cancer surgery, it also prevents the 'natural' closing of the wounds caused by removing the lymph glands – a desirable outcome. Trade offs.) Both of us will be happy for the tube to come out as it prevents Martijn's progressive mobility and interferes with sleeping, dressing normally, etc. However, we are both pretty darn happy with progress so far.



Last night Casey O'Dell and her husband, Jerome Fransen, came, cooked and conquered our hearts. Jerome comes from a famous Maastricht delicatessen family and has savory sensibility running in his veins. Casey hails from a Dallas family and also knows how to create great chow, so between the two of them we were served a feast worthy of a castle or a ranch! Of course, after a hearty meal both Martijn and I fell asleep watching the charming new penguin classic, 'Surf's Up'! This was no reflection on the good company only our own sated state.

FUTURE: I'm hoping to nudge myself back into a work mode. While I can't plan too far ahead, I think I'll be up to conduct the kind of consulting or training that allows me to be away from home for shorter periods, working mostly out of my home office when I don't need face-to-face time. Martijn hopes to build back his weight and stamina. Once the wound is stable and the tubes are gone he can increase walking and minor exercise. We are mindful that this is an agonizingly slow process. Just keep in mind how severe his surgery was. And in the back of our consciousness, we hold the grim prognosis about the aggressive and elusive nature of the anal squamous cell carcinoma he has. His recovery thus far has made our optimism more valid; still, we understand the bigger picture.

NOW: "Our lifetime exists only in the present moment, after all. Past, present, future realized in a warm embrace, a smile, and act of kindness. Be well, be wise, and laugh a lot." – Susan Schaefer



Brothers

Mon Nov 12 09:47:00 CST 2007 |

Noel and Martijn, at home, Maastricht, Monday, November 12, 2007

Baby bro', Noel, who at almost 45 is ten years younger than big bro' Martijn, came a'callin' today. See the resemblance? Noel always knows exactly what little treats to bring along. This time it was rich, dense chocolate bon bons that looked astoundingly like, well...breasts, and a jar of capers. The brothers shared a lot of laughs and good conversation and Noel helped me out by pumping up the front tire on my bike.

The Earth Shall Claim Your Limbs: Martijn's Journey With Anal Cancer

Earlier Martijn continued his own pumping up, beginning to increase his physicality with new routines under the guidance of his physical therapist, Ineke while I got my own 'practical' workout by lifting buckets of steaming hot water during a deep and fundamental cleaning of the house. I also ramped up my job and consulting hunting and began re-working my own personal career plan. Dr. Davy Meyers made his weekly call from the States and later in the week I hope to continue using David as a sounding board on career matters. An invitation from my good buddy, Birgit and her partner, Mary for a real Limburg style dinner out this weekend with Ursula as my 'date' gave me a feeling that little by little some normalcy is returning to our routines.

Tomorrow Martijn will host one of his dearest and oldest friends, fellow philosopher Wijnand van Lieshout, while I enjoy dinner and a movie with Casey. Looking forward to that. Signing off now, Suze



Connections

Tue Nov 13 08:33:00 CST 2007 |

Martijn & dear friend & fellow philosopher Wijnand van Lieshout, at home, Maastricht, Tuesday, November 13, 2007.



This is Silvie, our favorite home nurse from the Groenekruis (Green Cross) Domicura agency, at home, Maastricht, Tuesday, November 13, 2007.

It is a cold, rainy autumn day but brightened by necessary connections. Each day the home nursing team, run by a non-profit organization named Groenekruis Domicura, sends nurses to check Martin's healing colostomy wound and to change and help him to learn to change the stoma bag, as it is called in Dutch. They have also been responsible for emptying and monitoring the lymph drain, measuring Martin's output and logging it twice a day. The latter duty has been hard won. The home care nurses are not all trained at a high professional level. While our experience has been that to the person each 'nurse' (male and female) has been a kind and willing caregiver, the home care system itself is fraught with problems. This is not to complain, but rather to note the reality. Martin's lymph drain is not unique, however his condition is. So while home care has trained nurses to work with such systems, here they ONLY are sent for breast cancer patients. For the past weeks Martijn, our general practitioner, Dr. Bom, and his surgeon, Dr. Keymeulen, have agitated to have the nurses qualified with this drainage system sent to our home with no success. The rules are that these trained nurses are uniquely for breast cancer patients. That's what I call not simply inflexible, but also simply stupid. So, for weeks Martijn himself has made countless calls to Groenekruis complaining that we had to train each new nurse (and you'd be shocked at how many different ones come rather than having an assigned nurse). At this point we're simply hoping that the drain comes out this coming Thursday, but the situation illuminates larger administrative issues with home care system. Still, as with Sylvie, on an individual basis we have liked and respected each caregiver and in general, I'm grateful that there is such a subsidized service.

As Martin's condition improves it is visits from very dear old friends, like Wijnand, that mark milestones. Today Wijnand

traveled from his home near Tilburg to spend an entire afternoon and evening. These two old friends share many memories and a kindred appreciation for philosophy. It is really heartwarming to observe them together. And my dear friend, and former husband, Bob Ingram, reconnected me today to my Philadelphia roots. He mailed me two videos, both produced by Max L. Rabb. "Rittenhouse Square" is a documentary about one of my favorite Philly pocket parks. I spent good portions of my university days simply hanging out in this square. Now, thanks to another old friend, Barbara Craig, the square is where I stay whenever I visit Philly since her condo sits above this Philadelphia landmark. The second documentary is entitled "Strut", a story of the one, the only Philadelphia Mummies and their famous New Year's Day parade. Now I realize why I relate so easily and readily to Maastricht's Carnival - it's the Mummies redux! Anyway, with my newly region free 'hacked' dvd players I'm in for some good viewing. So, our journey continues with professional and personal connections that link and nurture us on Martin's road to recovery.

Life is Like a Box of Chocolates



Thu Nov 15 15:19:00 CST 2007 |

The title of this blog is a quote from the film, "Forrest Gump" which continues, "You never know what you're going to get." This week, life really was like a box of chocolates. In reality we received three boxes of chocolate bon bons along with many sweet visits and surprise packages. I had 'dinner and movie' with Casey (along with many more sweets). Tomorrow Tessa and Scott breeze in from Minnesota to share cheer and news. We found someone to help with cleaning the house and a new bank that caters to international transactions and has English internet banking. But the best bon bon came today when Martijn had the drainage tube removed. Sweet, sweet. Hopefully, the result will be what the doctors hope for - not too much leaking from the small remaining incision or too much edema, a well-known side effect once the drains are removed. Earlier in the week Martijn was fitted for long support hose. Hopefully he'll perform a drag show for me in private ala "Benny Hill". Go ahead, buy a delicious box of chocolate - really decadent ones and share them with a friend. Or present them to a stranger. You never know what you're going to get. Life is too short not to indulge.





Amazing amiable emissaries

Sat Nov 17 05:58:00 CST 2007 |

Tessa Gunther and Scott Hagg visit us, Maastricht, Friday, November 16, 2007.



Our Gang: Dinner Party at Monica & John's, our old 'hood', Seward Neighborhood, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Saturday, November 10, 2007. From left: Claudia, Mary Ann, Therese, Tom, dik (standing) Carmen, John, Monica, Scott, Tessa, Anne, Luis.



Tessa and Scott made an amazing decision. They took a long weekend holiday from Minneapolis to Amsterdam dedicating one entire day just to shed their mellow light and love our way. That's a lot of hours and miles for a brief visit. (Minneapolis to Amsterdam = 8 hours, and that's just flying, not to mention getting to airport, waiting at the airport, etc. Amsterdam to Maastricht by direct train = 2 1/2 hours!)



Martijn and I were moved to tears by their easy and spontaneous characters, by their generosity of heart and 'cart' (they schlepped bags full of items from the states that we can't get here), and by their role as emissaries from a core circle of our Minneapolis/St. Paul friends pictured above. They came bearing special handmade cards and notes and special gifts like a warm scarf for Martijn's scrawny neck and a magical bag of healing stones prepared by Anne from all corners of the world.



We prepared a little Maastricht-style feast for our amicable emissaries lit by our new electronic fireplace (great fire video). We shared stories and caught up on Tessa and Scott's new life together (married over two years ago) and then I got to conduct a magical mystery of tour of Maastricht by fading sunlight and romantic moonlight. Alas, the darling duo left too soon but the memories of this mission of mercy and merriment will linger on for many moons to come. We love you Minnesota!



Here I am with good pal Ursula Glunk and new friends Mary Waller and Birgit Schneidmuller, at the Pannekeukenhuis, St. Geertruid, Saturday, November 17, 2007.

Saturday Night at the Pannekeukenhuis

Sun Nov 18 15:28:00 CST 2007 |

Birgit and I are lectures in the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration's Marketing Department while her partner Mary and Ursula both are professors in the Organization and Strategy Department (just around the corner). Mary and I are American. Birgit and Ursula are both from the same region of Germany. This was the first time we all got together for a social evening and it felt incredibly comfortable – like being with old friends.

Plus, the family style restaurant that Birgit and Mary recommended was a total hoot! Just as we were polishing off some potent "Dutch Coffee" made with a very tasty and strong local Limburg liqueur, in marches the local band. Click the arrow for a taste of a Limburg style marching band. Remember, Carnival is a wee few months away. Martijn, meanwhile enjoyed his own very Limburg evening at mom's where she cooked up a very regional delicacy - rabbit in red wine sauce.

This evening represents a milestone - our very first 'night' out in almost five months - since Martin's condition cascaded downward. We both enjoyed our respective experiences, conversations, food and companionship. And today a follow-up milestone – Martijn took his own shower and walked unaided and alone outside!!

I had my own walk along the River Muese chatting with Claudia Chaves and Mary Ann Mayer, then with that 'yakky' ole Yurt Builder himself, Sir Heinz Brummel, who called from his cozy position inside the EarthShip Martijn (see 'Heinz Builds A Yurt named Earth Ship Martijn', Wednesday, October 31st entry) to announce its completion. We closed a good weekend while watching the documentary on the Philadelphia Mummers' Day Parade sent to us by Bob Ingram

entitled 'Strut' while chowing down on a hearty dinner of homemade turkey sausage with a side of mashed ginger/garlic, sweet potato, broccoli and zucchini. Yum. Later, my best pal Sally Eves phoned from upstate Pennsylvania to regale me with hysterical tales of her childhood pets. All in all this was one great weekend. We are very aware of being alive and very grateful.



Bottom's Up

Tue Nov 20 15:56:00 CST 2007 |

The Masterpiece and The Master. *Martijn's bum shown with a healing stone sent by Anne McQuinn, Friday, November 16, 2007.* It is difficult to explain just how miraculous this



bottom is or how much admiration and awe we have for *Dr. John H. Sawor, pictured here in the plastic surgery clinic at azM (Academic Hospital Maastricht), Monday, November 19, 2007,* as Martijn returned for his two month check up. A mere 60 days ago a team of top-notch surgeons including Drs. Keymeulen and Huizinga removed a cancerous tumor the size of Martijn's hand. That culprit was far larger than any of the scans ever showed or any of Martijn's doctors expected. As reported here, they had to make critical decisions on the spot that entailed removing Martijn's anus, rectum, part of his lower spine and 15 lymph nodes of which 5 showed cancerous cells. It was Dr. Sawor's job to anticipate the possibilities and help reconstruct Martijn so he could resume as normal a life as possible post surgery. The resulting wound was incredibly large. Dr. Sawor had previously determined to use the large *grisailles* muscle of Martijn's thigh along with skin and tissue and fat (what little he had) from his abdomen to pack and cushion the reconstructed posterior. Keep in mind that the resulting bum has no opening now – no crack or hole, but looking at his masterpiece you wouldn't know it. Martijn was opened in so many ways – the thigh, his abdomen in two places, one for removal of the fat, the other to create his colostomy – but it is here, at the bitter end, so to speak, where the rubber hits the road. And rubber is what Martijn says it feels like. Sitting on rubber. He talks a lot about how most people take sitting for granted. He knows. But, as his '*bil plastiek*' (ass plastic reconstruction) heals we both admit that from any distance, this '*tush*' deserves a "*Bottom's Up*" toast! We feel incredibly fortunate that Dr. Sawor was his surgeon.



Electronic Hearth

Fri Nov 23 08:11:00 CST 2007 |

Here we are by the electronic hearth welcoming Tessa & Scott just last Friday, November 16th. Their visit seems already so distant. Today in America is called "Black Friday" for the busiest shopping day of the year when, supposedly, all retail goes into the black (profitability) rather the red (deficit). So, many of my fellow Americans could today help bolster this scary, flagging economy. Today we're staying close to the electronic fireplace trying to absorb the events of this week, one that seems to have marked an upswing in Martin's mobility and vigor.



Here is King Frog himself, another nice portrait taken last week by Scott. On Wednesday, Martijn and I attended a lecture on "The Democratic Deficit in the EU" by Professor Dr. Tannelie Blom, Director of the European Studies Programme at the University of Maastricht where I received my degree. This was a big step for Martijn, his first real outing for almost four months! He enjoyed the lecture and even made a brief trip inside a nearby supermarket afterward.



Here's a colorful shot of Tessa and me near Maastricht's Central Station last week.

Last night we enjoyed an intimate Thanksgiving dinner with Ursula, making many toasts to give thanks for bounty of the friendship and support of so many wonderful friends around the world. We wish one and all a great start to the holiday season.

Thanksgiving 2006

Mon Nov 26 16:26:00 CST 2007 |

These events seem to have happened a lifetime, not a year ago. I couldn't resist posting this little remembrance of last Thanksgiving weekend in Maastricht. It is very cool that Blogger now lets us post movies directly without first uploading through YOUTube. In the present, we're still digesting this past weekend's leftovers. Martijn made a nice feast for his mother and Marcel last night, then we treated them to the documentary, 'Rittenhouse Square' narrated and directed by Robert Downey, Sr. (yes, junior's real life dad!) that Bob Ingram kindly sent us. It was nice showing off a treasured part of my fair hometown to my in-laws. Watching the dvd I realized how much I hope that Martijn and I can both travel together again. I especially would like to spend some time with him back on my beloved east coast. Today Martijn walked a mile. We had to go to the medical supply store to learn how to apply his 'sexy' new toe to thigh compression hose to tackle the lymph edema issue. The walk was great - nice crisp autumn weather and he didn't have a problem. Getting that tight stocking on, now that's a different issue. Hope all our American friends had a fulfilling (all puns intended) Turkey Holiday. Signing off - gobble gobble.



Support of a Different Type

Wed Nov 28 16:42:00 CST 2007 |

Although Martijn continues to grow more robust the lymph edema condition needs to be addressed. So, he is now wearing a toe-to-ass support stocking on his wounded leg where the lymph fluid collected causing edema, not a good condition to have. The stocking is REALLY tight and thus, uncomfy, but he knows, given the whole picture of things that happened, this is not a bad situation to endure. Still, it is a BIG procedure to pull this contraption on him in the morning. Martijn still cannot bend or sit comfortably and the stocking must be applied, so I actually went for a lesson to learn the proper technique!!! Alas, dear fans, these are neither his legs nor stocking color, he had no choice so his is pale flesh tone and not quite as sexy as this advert. Keep your kind of support in the form of holding us in your hearts coming. (If he hangs this thing by the chimney at Christmas he'll really get a load of goodies!) Ho, ho for now.

Friendship and fame



Sat Dec 01 09:39:00 CST 2007 |

Sometimes during the past months I really screamed to ease the fear and tension. Here I am with Tessa Gunther last month hamming it up for Scott's camera. This week Martin's increased mobility and independence has allowed both of us to resume more normal routines.



Nawal El Saadawi, activist/author prepares for her lecture. Barbara Greenberg and daughter Sophie invited me to hear Nawal El Saadawi speak at one of the regular lecture series hosted by the University of Maastricht this past Thursday evening, November 29th. During our post lecture nightcap Barbara and I agreed that El Saadawi was getting by on 'fumes' from her past works. Her presentation was scattered, contradictory, and lacked any substantiation at best; at worst, she ranted and made some dangerous accusations. All the more pity since she is a bright and talented voice for the oppressed and under privileged. Although she redeemed herself during the animated Q&A session later, I was disappointed.



Our work week ended with a most fitting reunion with our wonderful 'Healing Touch' Angel, Gerry Hartmayer, shown here at a farewell party at her home in Maastricht. She and husband Bob are relocating back to the U.S. to be closer to family and friends. The event was moving and meaningful and many colleagues and friends, most from Bob's workplace, DSM, honored both Gerry and Bob. These occasions tend to be stiff but this emotional response was a testament to this special couple. And how symbolic that this was Martin's first real evening out. We both believe that Gerry's care and concern for us hastened his healing. We wish Bob and Gerry much pleasure and luck in their transition back to their native USA.



Giving Thanks for Miracles

Wed Dec 05 16:38:00 CST 2007 |

Pawel Kromholz gazes into the Menorah's flickering lights and wife Barbara Greenberg listens as Martijn offers with heartfelt sincerity the following traditional prayer on the first night of Hanukkah, the Jewish festival of lights:

"Blessed are thou, Adonai, great creator, who has sanctified us by your commandments and directed us to light the Hanukkah lights. Blessed are thou, Adonai, great creator, who has performed miracles for our ancestors in times of old at this time of year." On the first night of Hanukkah there is an additional prayer: "Thanks be to you, Adonai, great creator, for keeping us alive and in good health and for bringing us together." That certainly says it all. May the lights burn bright for each of you and your loved ones whatever faith you follow during this season of magic and mystery.



Reflections

Sun Dec 09 17:55:00 CST 2007 |

It has been a very good week and weekend. Tonight dear friend Jens Hasse, one of my University of Maastricht EPA Masters Programme classmates, came to visit from his nearby home in Aachen, Germany. Here we are pictured in August 2006 when he visited Martijn and me at the family's summer cabin located in nearby Lanaken, Belgium. This evening, Jens brought Martijn a lovely book of landscape photography and we spent time catching up on each other's lives. Then Martijn headed off for Sunday dinner with Geri and Marcel and Jens treated me to my favorite Maastricht pizza and more good conversation. Last night Martijn and I hosted friends Mary Waller and Birgit Schneidmuller for an Indonesian feast and more good conversation.



Thursday evening good friend Maurice Schoffelen hosted me for dinner and then took me to Lanaken to see the premiere of *The Golden Compass* (starring my hero, ice bear Iorek Byrnison pictured above) while Martijn again spent time at his mother's. This activity reflects Martin's continued progress and independence. He is walking on his own steam to his mother's. He's doing food shopping and preparing dinners and continuing to gain weight. All tremendous markers of his will and determination towards health. But, my reflections beget others, reflections on the fear that accompanies the hope of Martin's amazing recovery, and the hope that accompanies the fear. I had intended to write about this until I came upon an article in this weekend's *Wall Street Journal Europe* that says it so eloquently, I direct you to it. I promise it is a good read. I've reprinted the lead here and invite you to follow the link to read the article in its entirety. I thank the author, Craig Winneker, and pray that his Rosie blooms bright, beautiful and strong.

Reflections on the Birth Of New Hopes and Fears

By CRAIG WINNEKER

December 7, 2007

"Fear" doesn't begin to describe what my wife and I felt when, just 27 weeks into our first pregnancy, we learned that our baby would have to be delivered prematurely. "Hope" isn't big enough of a word to contain our emotions now that our little girl is here.

As Rosie struggles to get bigger, to develop, even to breathe, our lives have become an inescapable intertwining of fear and

hope. The more fearful we are, the more we need to hope. The more hopeful we feel, the more we set ourselves up to fear things that might go wrong. The two emotions feed off each other. All new parents must experience this to varying degrees. Suddenly, at a time when there are so many big things to worry about in the world -- from war to economic uncertainty to environmental degradation -- we find

ourselves focused on something very small indeed.

Imagine



Tue Dec 11 15:56:00 CST 2007 |

It was twenty-seven years ago that my mother, Emma, passed away, one evening after John Lennon's assassination. I always remember both during these short winter days by lighting a candle and meditating on their respective lives. My mother had a very difficult life plagued by illness after my birth. *This photo shows her (left in the dark suit) in more carefree times posing with her friend on the boardwalk in Atlantic City.* Before I was born she was vibrant and bright, holding a responsible job during WWII at Philadelphia's Frankfort Arsenal. Despite her incredibly poor health, my mother reached her 70th birthday loved and admired by many.



I don't need to tell most people about John Lennon's life. He used his fame and fortune in his later years to promote the concept of peace and positive change. He asked us to imagine a world where we live in accord with our own beliefs, respecting those of others. 'You can say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one'... He believed in the power created by individuals bonding around a cause. I hope that you, like me, imagine such a world. Experiencing Martin's miraculous recovery reinforces such a concept. I reached out to friends, colleagues and even strangers. The concentrated love and energy of so many people cemented my belief that positive thought and action can change the world. I like to think my mother believed in such possibilities, too, though she never could express it. John Lennon etched hope in the consciousness of millions. You, my friends, radiated such hope during my dark hours. Imagine. Imagine. Imagine and act.



Lacy light

Sun Dec 16 14:07:00 CST 2007 |

Lacy light etched a mural on our wall this morning as I sipped my cappuccino and re-read Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel*.

Last night Martijn and I had our first romantic evening out since May. We dined at our favorite Maastricht restaurant, now graced with a Michelin rating, and appropriately named, Le Courage. It took a lot of courage for Martijn to sit up for two-and-a-half-hours, but the feast of shellfish soup, baked skate, venison in chocolate wine sauce and a three course dessert eased any dis-ease he may have felt sitting on his reconstructed bottom for such a long stretch. This morning we continued this time of wonder by sleeping in, later breaking fast with oatmeal and fruit.

Later we crossed the hoge brugge (high bridge) to the old city where we visited our favorite gallery which has a large collection of Cornille and other CoBRA artists. Here is



Martijn on the high bridge framed by our lovely rolling and currently roiling River Muese. Directly over his left shoulder you see the rocket ship that is the Bonnefanten Museum³ designed by Italian architect Aldo Rossi and just to the right of that the Kennedy Bridge behind which sits the seat of government for the entire province of Limburg⁴. Later we enjoyed our customary dinner at mother's house, candle lit and cozy. These are truly days of wonder.

Coming On Christmas

Sun Dec 23 07:02:00 CST 2007 |

We take a break from our holiday preparations to enjoy the pool, hot tub and sauna here at Centre Ceramique. This is Martin's trial swim and it went, well...swimmingly! We hope you are also able to take time during this possibly hectic holiday season to simply savor the moment. Cheers, Susan



Not tinsel and lights

Tue Dec 25 13:21:00 CST 2007 |

This is young David Zagajšek, seated in a cafe in his home of Ljubljana, Slovenia in October 2006. Daivd, who is the son of my dear friend Irena, included the following poem with our holiday greeting. I don't know if it's original, but it is lovely and sums up the truth of this special day:



Christmas is not in tinsel and lights and outward show; the secret lies in an inner glow. It's lighting fire inside the heart; good will and joy a vital part. It's higher thought and greater plan; it's glorious dream in the soul of man.
Here I am with mama Irena at her seaside home in Piran, Solvenia the same year.

To all of our friends we wish you higher thought and a glorious dream. And, that we awake one day to discover that peace has broken out all over the world.



Ordinary life in an ExtraOrdinary Way

Sun Dec 30 06:54:00 CST 2007 |

It has been an extraordinary year with challenges and blessings beyond ordinary. But, what is ordinary in times like ours? My personal year was filled with the "extra" challenge of Martin's cancer diagnosis, treatment, then the shock of the treatment failing to produce the desired results, the surgery, the fears associated with that, and now his astounding recovery. Compounding this journey were various hits and misses regarding my career. I was recruited for a number of top positions, including the role of CEO for an international foundation which I found to be a mismatch for my expertise and conscience. On the other hand I began lecturing for the University of Maastricht and consulting for the City of Maastricht and an international foundation based here in Maastricht, the European Centre for Development Policy Management, known in the international development field as ecdpm.

But many individuals are faced with health and livelihood issues. One in three westerners is expected to have a bout with cancer in his/her lifetime, for example. And many people lose jobs or seek meaningful work. Given the emerging 'credit crisis' of the developed world, many now are facing more fundamental problems like losing their homes. So, regarding Martin's health and my livelihood, we, at least, begin the prospect of the new year with extraordinary prospects.

During times of crisis most of us contract our personal universes, but I have tried in my most sincere albeit imperfect way to continually look beyond at the bigger world even as I felt consumed at times by my own particular situation this year. I managed two trips outside the region, the first for my CEO interview which took place in Phoenix, Arizona and during which I stopped by to visit with dear friends in Minnesota (which conveniently is a direct flight from Amsterdam). And, just before Martin's scheduled surgery I traveled once again to Slovenia to be with my good friend Irena (see last blog entry), continuing on to holiday in Croatia. But during this 'vacation' I was also ill, and distracted by Martin's condition, so I returned home earlier than planned for. I missed the 40th high school reunion of

my beloved Girls' High in Philadelphia, even though I was originally one of its organizers, but have kept up with countless classmates who provided and continue provide extraordinary emotional support.

As an inveterate extrovert, gaining much of my energy from external interactions, I sought and received much outside contact this year. We hosted many guests and I was especially grateful for visits from David Fey and Carol Malkinson from Minneapolis for my most vulnerable stage of Martin's illness. And Martin's family - mother Geri and Marcel, brother Jan and wife Irma, sister Elly and husband Paul, and brother Noel, and the countless stream of friends who came all were all extraordinary in their help and support. So, perhaps my ability to reach out and connect are a bit extraordinary. I kept current on world events. In May I interviewed author Jeremy Rifkin penning an opinion piece scheduled to be published in January in the Philadelphia Daily News. I also wrote two additional Op/Ed pieces, one on Soft Power in Harry Potter, the other on the collapse of the I-35W highway bridge in my former home of Minneapolis for which I'm still shopping for placements.

Is my life more complex than that of family, friends and colleagues? Are my beliefs and hopes and struggles and dreams any more or less ordinary than those of others? I don't think so. I merely think I live an ordinary life in an extraordinary way.

What is ordinary? We live in times defined by the ability to literally destroy the planet, or at least major portions of it. Einstein (and other of his colleagues who participated in the modern science that among other things spilt the atom unleashing just such a potential) realized that the atomic age brought forth the capacity for extraordinary menace as well as extraordinary miracles. Among his many quotes I find this one most hopeful: "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them;" followed by this bit of sagacious advice: "Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius -- and a lot of courage -- to move in the opposite direction."

So, I offer you my poem with images, to help you consider your own extraordinary self. It's not that I have any specific plan to help unite us, rather a small belief that we are each capable of engaging our imaginations toward moving the trajectory of this world in a direction of peace and abundance and acting accordingly. Many of us already are. Next year I will focus on completing my Intentional Transitions book and workshops to help individuals who are ready, willing and able to do so. Thank you for accompanying me on this journey.



Meuse Rhine Triangle

Sun Jan 06 12:48:00 CST 2008 |

The holidays confirmed what a diverse and lovely area we live in. Four minutes from our door is this path towards the River Meuse (also called the Maas, hence the name Maastricht loosely meaning the place where one can cross the River). Heading south along the path we pass the incredibly urban and sophisticated Bonnefanten Museum (see December 16th entry).



Continuing along this path we come to the architecturally interesting *Province House* (also covered in the Dec. 16th entry) emerging into a lovely and surprising rural landscape, complete with wild steers and horses who inhabit a protected wildlife area.



Continuing southward some 25 minutes by car we can be in the Belgian city of Liege, one foot of the Meuse Rhine Triangle (the others are Aachen, Germany and Maastricht). Part of our wonderful two-week holiday was spent with *good friends Ton Schaap and Herman Rouw, shown here with Martijn during our day in Liege.*



Among other things *Liege boasts 'the Citadel' a former lookout post scraping the clouds.* One route to get there are the famous steps of Liege.



Here I am already tilted by the strain of the ascent.

Martijn scurried these steps like a cat after its tasty mouse. We were all duly impressed with his increasing stamina. You get the idea looking here over Herman's shoulder as he viewed down from the top. More on about how we spent our holidays to come. We hope yours were all you wished for. Happy 2008!



Antwerp Solstice

Mon Jan 07 10:14:00 CST 2008 |

Antwerp, about a two-hour drive from Maastricht, is a city and municipality in Belgium, the capital of the Antwerp province in Flanders, one of Belgium's three regions, a center for fashion and design, and where I spent my favorite holiday



in December - Winter's Solstice, *with good friend, Maurice Schofflen*. It has long been an important city in the nations of the Benelux (Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands) both economically and culturally. This is Antwerp City Hall at the Grote Markt (Main Square) with the Christmas Market in full swing in the foreground.

Here is Maurice ready to capture me seated in the comforting Hand of Antwerp (below) on the main shopping street.



Antwerp is located on the right bank of the river Scheldt, which is linked to the North Sea by the Westerschelde. Antwerp's seaport is one of the world's largest, and after the port of Rotterdam the second largest in Europe.

Antwerp is synonymous with Diamonds, and families of the large Hasidic Jewish community have traditionally controlled Antwerp's global centre of the diamond trading industry. It is also a rising fashion city, and has produced designers such as the Antwerp Six. The city has a cult status in the fashion world, due to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, one of the most important fashion academies in Europe. It has served as the learning centre for a large number of Belgian fashion designers.

With Martijn still unable to make a trip that requires so much sitting, Maurice gallantly offered me this day trip to one of my favorite nearby cities. There's lots to do and see. We toured the famous Reuben's House as our cultural offering for the day, ending up in the evening in the newly renovated indoor bourse shopping area, a great end to a fine outing.



Local color

Wed Jan 09 16:18:00 CST 2008 |

Here the new year has been marked by milestones as impressive to Martijn and me as *the Castle at Antwerp shown here*. Yesterday the hospital bed that predominated Martin's study/the main guest room exited with two friendly Maastricht 'green cross' medical movers. Adieu, adios, ciao! We were grateful for a medical system that provided such service and are equally grateful that for now, Martijn has no further need.



Also significant, yesterday marked the beginning of my working relationship with European Centre for Development

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Policy Management, aka ecdpm, located 10 minutes walk from our front door over this, Maastricht's elegant pedestrian bridge. I'll be assisting the Centre with a range of strategic communications beginning with crafting a positioning document. The Centre has been around for 20 years doing the nearly invisible yet rather heroic work of making sure that countries from Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific, known as ACP, are properly informed and represented in European Union development efforts. The organization is modest yet mighty, and now they are seeking new ways to tell their story. I'm thrilled to be involved.

Next week I'll step back in the classroom facilitating an all day workshop for the Masters Students in the Marketing Department in the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at the University of Maastricht, the department where I am a lecturer. During this long period of Martin's illness and recovery I've been unable to assume my former role in the Department. Teaching this business communication skills course that I developed will feel like the clouds parting over Liege pictured here.

All in all, 2008 has been gracious to us. We hope it has been for you as well.

Inside the Brussels Beltway

Mon Jan 14 10:53:00 CST 2008 |

Last Friday, January the 11th, was a whirlwind day. I departed from my home base of Maastricht, the Netherlands on the 7:07 AM international train for the one-and-a-half-hour trip direct to Brussels to meet Geert Laporte, who heads up Institutional Relations for the European Centre for Development Policy Management, (ECDPM), my new client. ECDPM is an organization that for the past 20 years has served as a fiercely independent, 'honest broker' in creating a level playing field between the European Union and its southern neighbors from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific to optimize and operationalize development policy that has a big impact for both sides.



Geert collected me across from Gare Midi, (Central Station), shown with an EU building in the background, at the posh Le Meridien Hotel. From there we trekked across Parc de Bruxxelles, past the Belgian Royal Palace on one side and the Belgian State Capitol (Parliament) or Palais de la Nation, shown here, on the other, ultimately arriving at the headquarters of the newly established "Permanent Residence" for Slovenia, the country that is the first of the new entrants of the recently expanded European Union of 27 Member States, and the first former communist nation, to hold the EU's six-month rotating presidency. As of 2007, three countries share the EU presidency over an 18-month, each taking its six months at the helm. (This works like some non-profit boards where the current president is aided by the immediate past president and the vice president.)



The Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs commissioned ECDPM to undertake a study on children affected by armed conflict, an issue that falls under the priorities agreed to by the current EU presidential troika of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia under a programme called 'Strengthening the European Union's Role as a Global Partner for Development'. ECDPM presented the study entitled "Enhancing the EU Response to Children Affected by Armed Conflict", as one of the kick off events of Slovenia's new presidency. It was my opportunity to view ECDPM work first-hand. These are members from the panel discussion following the presentation.

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The majority of members of audience, who were from international organizations and government agencies such as: the International Rescue Committee, Instituto Português de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento, and the European Commission's Directorate of Development, responded favorably to the report while asking for more concrete recommendations in the future. Women impacted by armed conflict will be the next topic to be covered in this series that overlaps many issues faced by the developing nations.

From this gathering on such a sobering topic I was whisked to a more festive reception for the first official representative of the EU to the African Union (AU), Belgian Koen Vervaeke, who will be based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. While Vervaeke is being called a full 'ambassador,' representing the EU Council and Commission, this formal title falls under a diplomatic corps that will only come into effect next January once the infamous EU Constitution, (once voted down by France and the Netherlands and now safely termed a "constitutional treaty") is ratified by all EU member states. Therefore, Mr Vervaeke, 47, who had been the director of the 'Task Force Africa' at the EU office for foreign affairs led by Javier Solana, is essentially a regional foreign minister with a mandate to talk on behalf of the entire EU.

Both events underline the intricacy of Brussels's beltway politics, with their multilevel, multi-actor makeup. I continue to follow with interest this evolving experiment in democracy called the European Union, and to marvel and respect its machinations based upon extreme cooperative principles. I'm finding that US-, or even UK-style politics, seem too unilateral to be successful in today's global meshworks. While observing the layers of policy making here is akin to watching paint dry, this style of compromise and consensus is practiced as a high art, and along with the multiple language skills of its participants seems the way of the future. Having a seat at this feast speaks volumes to the fact that we unilingual, unilateral Americans seem ill-equipped indeed for truly global leadership.



Dreaming Big - Philadelphia Op/Ed column

Tue Jan 22 14:08:00 CST 2008 |

Nice day. The Philadelphia Daily News ran the opinion piece I submitted back in May. To see it online, please click here, [Philly.com](#)¹, opinion piece. Or read the text below.

Europe's lessons for Philly
By SUSAN SCHAEFER

IN A COLUMN last year, Phil Goldsmith invited Philadelphians to dream big, particularly about what it takes to have a great city. He mentioned that it's good to leave home every so often to see what others are doing. I'm a Philly girl, born in the Cradle of Liberty of the New World who's been curious to learn why the Old World seems to be outpacing us. And I actually left home to do it I came to Maastricht, the Netherlands, like some Alexis de Tocqueville in reverse, to study and learn as Europe forges its new democratic experiment called the European Union.

A while back, I caught up with author and economist Jeremy Rifkin, who literally wrote the book about Europe and dreaming big, "The European Dream."

Rifkin, who teaches at Penn when he's not trotting around the globe advising European movers and shakers, was the keynote speaker last year on Europe's Independence Day (May 9) at a conference celebrating the 15th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht, the document credited with launching the current EU.

I asked him what Americans, specifically Philadelphia leaders, could learn from European examples and why he believes the old American Dream is failing us.

The U.S. now ranks 24th among industrialized nations in income inequality, a crucial measure of a country's ability to deliver on the promise of prosperity. America is at rock bottom of the list with more poor people than 18 of the most-developed European nations. The U.S. homicide rate is four times higher than the EU's. Most disturbing, the rates of childhood homicides, suicides and gun-related deaths exceed those of the other 25 wealthiest nations!

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Nowhere is the death of the American Dream more evident than in Philadelphia, which had 406 homicides last year, the highest number in nine years. This isn't the Philly of my youth.

What happened?

"The American Dream worked for two centuries," Rifkin suggested, but unraveled quickly after the '60s, when the civil-rights and anti-war movements divided the country. Neo-conservative, then neo-liberal, economics resulted in shareholders' needs trumping those of employees and the community.

"If one wants to understand how to make things right, one has to have a frame of reference, or a dream, that's based on good criteria," Rifkin said. What made America a great country for 200 years was the bond between citizens, government and the market. Somewhere along the line, Americans soured on this belief in a sense of solidarity with their fellow human beings, opting for the rugged individualism of: "Yo, I take care of me and mine."

These days, services that foster a healthy, safe society, like education and health care, are expected to turn a profit. But it would be smart to check out just who's profiting. Statistics say it ain't the guy on the street. If Americans define freedom as autonomy and mobility, Europeans concentrate on inclusivity. They feel free only when they see that others in their communities are free, too.

What's the message? Although they complain, most EU citizens fork out huge percentages of their income in high taxes that fund a social safety net sometimes jointly administered by government agencies and not-for-profits to protect Europe's most vulnerable citizens. Sure, things in Europe are galloping toward a market economy, but most of my European friends wouldn't trade this expensively financed social contract for what they see as the busted up, mean streets of America. They want and expect all citizens to have access to good childcare, education and social services. They want a safe, nonviolent society.

Rifkin riffs: "Your dreams become your reality. If everyone thinks, 'I'm an island unto myself, I'm not responsible for my fellow human being, I'm only responsible for my own well-being,' then why do we get surprised when we don't have communities functioning with solidarity to people?" Oh, yeah, Eurozone economic growth and productivity have lately outpaced that of the U.S. Seems "solidarity to people" may not just provide a safe, non-violent society, but even a healthy return on investment. So I agree with Phil Goldsmith, sometimes bigger dreams really do pay off. *

Susan Schaefer is a former editor of Philly's late South Street Star. A video featuring a portion of the Rifkin interview can be seen on her blog: schaefermillennium3.blogspot.com



This Frank and Ernest cartoon is reportedly the origin of the now-famous statement often wrongly attributed to Ginger herself

Backwards and in High Heels - Stupor Tuesday

Tue Feb 05 06:08:00 CST 2008 |

Former Governor of Texas, Ann Richards, is also often wrongly credited for this quote, because she used it in her keynote address to the Democratic National Convention in 1988.

Even from far-away Maastricht, the Netherlands, I am and stay active in USA politics. I vote, I continue to pay taxes in Minnesota, and I avidly follow one of the most critical presidential campaigns of our times.

Yesterday I was forwarded a very long message from an author whose work and mind I greatly admire and respect, Riane Eisler, woman, scholar, and independent thinker, whose recent book, *The Real Wealth of Nations*, addresses the injustices I believe are running and ruining the current Democrat presidential nominee campaign in America.

Eisler's forwarded email was very long – but so is a presidential term in office. In it were quoted award-winning authors and poets Maya Angelou and Robin

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Morgan who present strong arguments that highlight the toxic levels of sexism prevalent in this presidential campaign.

Here is an excerpt from Robin Morgan's article:

Goodbye to the toxic viciousness . . .

Carl Bernstein's disgust at Hillary's "thick ankles." Nixon-trickster Roger Stone's new Hillary-hating 527 group, "Citizens United Not Timid" (check the capital letters). John McCain answering "How do we beat the bitch?" with "Excellent question!" Would he have dared reply similarly to "How do we beat the black bastard?" For shame.

Goodbye to the HRC nutcracker with metal spikes between splayed thighs. If it was a tap-dancing blackface doll, we would be righteously outraged—and they would not be selling it in airports. Shame.

Goodbye to the most intimately violent T-shirts in election history, including one with the murderous slogan "If Only Hillary had married O.J. Instead!" Shame.

Goodbye to Comedy Central's "Southpark" featuring a storyline in which terrorists secrete a bomb in HRC's vagina. I refuse to wrench my brain down into the gutter far enough to find a race-based comparison. For shame.

Goodbye to the sick, malicious idea that this is funny. This is not "Clinton hating," not "Hillary hating." This is sociopathic woman-hating. If it were about Jews, we would recognize it instantly as anti-Semitic propaganda; if about race, as KKK poison. Hell, PETA would go ballistic if such vomitous spew were directed at animals. Where is our sense of outrage—as citizens, voters, Americans?

I add that all people should be outraged, not only Americans, certainly not only women!

I support Hillary Rodham Clinton's nomination as the Democratic Presidential candidate because I think she can do the best job, full stop. And yes, I do indeed bristle at the sexist prattle that has marred her campaign from its start. While I am ashamed that her strategy has also succumbed to 'bottom of the barrel' tactics, the response fits the playing field since not only Mr. Obama's camp, but also the Republicans AND sexist pundits say unimaginable things about Hillary (extend this to any powerful, smart woman). (In the acrimonious American political arena it seems impossible to stay alive without countering, though I do not condone such tactics.)

Today, Super Tuesday, (which I consider Stupor Tuesday) I felt the need to state my support for Hillary Rodham Clinton. Just yesterday I stood in front of the headquarters of Germany's first woman Chancellor, Angela Merkel, in Berlin. That trip is a whole other story. Suffice it to say, that Chancellor Merkel stands as reminder that gender plays NO part in qualifications. The criteria for leadership should be proven experience, applicable talent, willingness to

subject yourself to the inhumane but inevitable scrutiny that comes with the job. The allegations of a Clinton dynasty are simply stupid. A dynasty is a succession of rulers who belong to the same family for generations. Can anyone validate the Rodham's (or Clinton's) dynastic roots of the? Here are her roots:

Hillary Diane Rodham was born at Edgewater Hospital in Chicago, Illinois, and was raised in a United Methodist family, first in Chicago, and then, from the age of three, in suburban Park Ridge, Illinois, which is also located in Cook County. Her father, Hugh Ellsworth Rodham, was a son of Welsh and English immigrants and operated a small but successful business in the textile industry. Her mother, Dorothy Emma Howell, of English, Scottish, French Canadian, Welsh, and possibly Native American descent, was a homemaker. She has two younger brothers, Hugh and Tony.

Women continue to be held to a higher standard than men. Let me end with a favorite quote that illustrates with humor yet truth our ongoing task:
"Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, except backwards and in high heels."

For me, in this year 2008, it is time to cast your vote for the authentic qualities in your candidate. If you have fallen prey to your unconscious prejudices and stereotypes, take a few moments to reflect about what is at stake for the United States of America. Have conversations or email debates with your friends and colleagues of differing opinions. Hone your thinking. Then, when you cast your ballots, vote your conscience. You, your children and the rest of the world are deeply impacted by this act.

Be wise, be well, and take democracy seriously.
Susan



Beating the Odds:Clinton/Obama Dream Team

Fri Feb 08 09:12:00 CST 2008 |

All the pundits admit that never has there been a more 'exciting race' for the US presidency. Indeed. From my European vantage point I believe excitement is not the operative adjective for this contest but rather 'globally critical'. At stake is the type of change possible only when a major fault line opens; status quo in America won't due.

Status quo opts for more of the same rhetoric from the fear mongers who so easily focus the minds of the average American on 'terror' and 'evil' while avoiding the real subjects that can create the very SECURITY for citizens they proclaim.

What are these topics? Let me begin with what they are not: they are not waging wars against 'evil doers' in far off lands; they are not building massive war machines that cost countless dollars feeding 'fat cat' industrialists along with their clubby boards of directors; they are not creating endless layers of secret surveillance agencies to spy on mostly innocent citizens; they are not

wiping out America's much touted 'inalienable rights' in the name of cheap witch hunts shown to yield little result at stopping the extremists.

These are the scare issues so brilliantly painted by those wielding power in today's White House and, alas, by the Republican candidates seeking its highest office in November. McCain and Romney (now removed from running but still a powerful voice) seem scripted by George Orwell himself. Reread Orwell's classic novel, 1984, to find the precise type of totalitarian fear mongering screeched by today's conservative American core. Sure world leaders must step up the hunt for known terrorists and their cells, but for heaven's sake get your friends and neighbors reading sane articles about the best methods and measures for doing this. There are institutes dedicated to research on the most effective means to build peace and security and intervening in crises and conflict.

One sure way to create security at home in the US, and abroad in tense, conflict prone hotspots, is to provide clean water, adequate food, basic education, access to diverse opinions (information), and democratic systems such as free and legal elections, rule of law, and human rights.

While the European Union and its member states are aware of the sometimes difficult call for flat out military intervention, they are light years ahead of the present US administration's maniac call for blood. Rather, the EU looks for complimentary means to make change. These fall under the aegis of development efforts to provide water, food, education, information, and the means to grow good governance that includes rule of law, human rights, transparency and inclusion. It doesn't mean that military means are ignored. It means that they are only part of a solution, and to be used as a last resort.

No Republican candidate will change the current isolationist, unilateral stance at aiming human and financial resources at military answers once in office. McCain has used the words Islam terrorist and extremist almost as if they were punctuation in every speech I've heard. Statecraft, diplomacy and multilateral discourse are foreign words in this Republican environment, whether conservative or moderate.

The ability of the political and media machine to divert the argument from the real and pressing issues facing Americans is so absolute and overwhelming as to create the real terror for cooler heads and more disciplined thinkers. Americans seem so anesthetized by their good life that they are unable to see the earthquakes and tornados wrecking havoc on this once-strong American Dream. With their attention diverted by talk of Islam extremists, they continue to miss the cues about the economy ravaged by the war in Iraq, by the offensive in Afghanistan, by the greedy financial industry, by the corrupt corporate climate, and by the very government supporting it all.

It is astounding to think what wake up call the nation needs. The wasteful war, the dot com bubble, hedge fund crisis, housing market bust...none of these

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signifiers seems to have actually moved the needle for change. Over half the nation still thinks that Republicans wrapped in the red, white and blue will protect them and their loved ones from the world beyond the coasts.

While I remain a supporter of Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton for President of the United States, I think the only way the Democrats can reach the White House in November is for these two maverick candidates in the American electoral firmament to unite now for real change. With Romney out of running the Republicans can galvanize their base early and strongly. Can senators Clinton and Barrack Obama rise above the melee to look towards the greater good of the country, and therefore the world by agreeing to team their considerable forces into one mighty plea for an end to the madness? Stranger things have happened.



Berlin: Madness, Mayhem, Modernity

Sun Feb 10 14:17:00 CST 2008 |

Susan stands solid with Karl



Ursula hangs out with Berlin's famous 'Ample man'



I didn't want to like Berlin. For many a year, since moving to Maastricht, I have struggled with my desire to visit this contradictory city, this place where a killing machine that defined the madness and mayhem that was the Third Reich took root. And then there was The Wall – the post-war punishment dividing a place and its people. For many, the punishment was nothing compared to the crimes that triggered its erection. I didn't want to like this once-noble city that succumbed to an illness named Hitler and his henchmen Goebels, Mengele, Himmler, Hess, Eichmann, Barbie.

The Holocaust Memorial disorients visitors with a chilling maze.



Gate from the oldest surviving synagogue located in the former East Berlin.



No, I didn't want to like Berlin. I listed countless other European hubs I'd rather visit, but its lure haunted me. I wanted to set foot, not where my 'lonsmen' were piled in heaps of ash and bones, but from the place where many departed or were dispatched. I was curious about the Berlin pre-World War II where they lived full and whole lives as citizens, contributors to the art, culture, economy and color of normal, regular everyday life. So, I have not yet visited the death camps, those mean, dark constructions of the unimaginable. But I felt it was time for me to see where the pain began.

The observation needle pierces Berlin's skyline orienting tourists and inhabitants alike.

I didn't want to like Berlin. But my life has allowed me the great gift of knowing that while history is important, the present is more so, and the future is critical.

I didn't want to like Berlin but because I love and respect my

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friends and colleagues who now live, and work and play there, I felt the time to see Berlin was right.

Ursula, Susan and Jens

Kathrin and Anne mug for the camera



And so it was with relief that I coordinated that journey with one of my closest friends, Ursula Glunk, who lives here in Maastricht and teaches at the university. And it was with gratitude that my young friends and colleagues, Anne Steinbrück and Kathrin Brockmann, both of whom graduated with me from my Masters of European Public Affairs Programme here in Maastricht, and now work and live in Berlin agreed to meet us. And it was greater fortune still that my dear friend, Jens Hasse, also from the Masters programme, choose that weekend to make a surprise visit as well.



With Ursula, Jens, Kathrin and Anne, I was surrounded by the living proof that life is what we make it. Their friendship and energy infused me with the understanding that I could view this city for what it was, but more so - for what it is. I didn't want to like Berlin but I fell in love with this Manhattan of Europe. It is a place filled with memory and magnetism. Yes, it is a haunted city, yet by virtue of all the acknowledgement and commemoration of its victims, it has liberated itself. Berlin enshrines memory but flows modernity.



New memorial to all victims of the Holocaust

Ironical echo of the memorial dome at chic French department store court.



Susan at the Brandenburg Gate. Later Ursula and I sat in the "Room of Silence" where we could center and process the many and conflicting sights and sounds evoked by this city of contrasts. There we read the amazing Prayer of the United Nations: "Oh Lord, our planet Earth is only a small star in space. It is our duty to transform it into a planet whose creatures are no longer tormented by war, hunger and fear, no longer senselessly divided by race, color and ideology. Give us courage and strength to begin this task today so that our children and children's children shall one day carry the name of Human with pride."



Bravo to a Berlin that rises from the ashes to face the future by facing its past.



Valentine Anniversary – A Dozen Years

Fri Feb 15 04:06:00 CST 2008 |

Twelve years ago, at 8:15 AM, on a sub-zero Valentine's Day in Minnesota, a dedicated group of friends faced the temperature and time to celebrate with us our wedding vows at the historic Whitney Hotel in Minneapolis, on the banks of the then frothy with ice, mighty Mississippi River. Here, Martijn and I look over St. Anthony Falls from our hotel penthouse balcony after the ceremony. Memorable is the fact that most of our guests intended to go to work that day but opted to continue the celebration after a few glasses of breakfast champagne!



At 8:15 this Valentine's Day, here we are commemorating a triumphant 12th wedding anniversary in bed with a cappuccino! Martijn's valiant recovery from cancer, treatments and an extensive amputation and reconstructive surgery made this our 'golden anniversary' rather than waiting another 38 years for the actual one. So, we opted out of work for this day, just as our friends did so many years ago, creating a holiday in our own town.



We attended the exhibition of spectacular 80 million-year-old dinosaur fossils recently opened around the corner from our home at the Centre Ceramique in collaboration with the Maastricht Natural History Museum and China. These China Dinosaurs are magnificent in detail and dimension. Enlivening the exhibit were some interactive activities like stepping into a gigantic dino food dish to measure your weight against dino's minimum daily meal requirements. (I more than comprised one tasty tidbit!) In fact, another activity had me fiercely pedaling a bike to try to outrun one hungry bugger approaching on film behind me. Whoosh, this time I became his tasty tidbit in about three seconds. Scientists estimate those guys could hoof it!

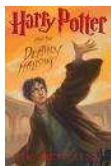
From bones to bronze - we next visited one of Maastricht's hidden treasures – its municipal museum, tucked away on the St. Pieterstraat. There we found a small but powerful exhibit of sculptures by Maastricht's own Appie Drielsma. From an online description: "Two opposites are clearly recognizable in Drielsma's oeuvre. An expressive and a constructive, that - as he says himself - are in line. He



Dining at Il Giardino, our new preferred Italian eatery

sometimes unites the two. "I can achieve the same proportions, rhythm, structure and movement in both languages of form." To strengthen the deeper meaning of his work, Drielsma uses signs, symbols and letters as expressive elements...In the portraits and masks he depicts the character of the model. In the monumental constructive work he uses geometrical forms. Because of the continuing change in lighting on the horizontal and vertical lines, the images appear to change shape continuously. The work is pure and serene."

And that's how we felt as we continued on stopping in our favorite local glass gallery for a hand-blown anniversary vase from a Czech glass cooperative, then heading for a drink prior to *dining at Il Giardino, our new preferred Italian eatery*. Given the events of the past year we were truly grateful to make this day in health and well being. We hope to spread our happiness to all corners of the globe reminding our circle of friends that you are judged not by how well you love, but how well you are loved.



Harry Potter Wields “Soft Power”

Mon Feb 18 15:50:00 CST 2008 |

Whatever prior literary borrowing was committed, whatever J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series lacks in sheer literary merit, the seventh installment, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, warranted its intense exposure this summer.

Claiming readership across generations, gender and geography, the book's detractors, like its “Dementors,” simply suck happiness from life.



Real world “Muggle” headlines of war, famine, floods and random violence returned soon enough. Since sensation sells news, hurrah that the stir of a book had the power to whisk the war in Iraq, the primary election campaigns in America, the floods in Britain, the fires in southern Europe, and global terrorism off our minds, albeit for a brief summer respite. In fact, real world leaders can learn a lesson from the boy wizard...

While multiple themes thread throughout the Potter series, this final volume touches on a topic more often found in the business or political press: Harry's ultimate feat is attainment of collaborative, reflective leadership. The boy wizard wields soft power.

Western mythology has focused on solitary heroes attaining supreme power: Divine right backed by divine might; one absolute hero vanquishing or vanquished by one clear villain. From Beowulf to Batman, heroes act alone and conquer evil with reciprocal violence. The message is and always has been – an eye for an eye, dominate or be dominated.

As a scholar of European Union public affairs and politics I have observed firsthand the EU's efforts for multilateral cooperation. Speaking at European University Institute seminar in Fiesole, Italy a few years ago, Harvard University scholar Joseph Nye defined and defended his soft power concept “as the ability to get what you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goals.” Years before I had heard Mssrs. Fisher, Ury and Susskind, the authors of *Getting to Yes* and *Breaking the Impasse*, respectively, similarly extol the benefits of “shared leadership” and collaboration at the MIT-Harvard Public Disputes Institute.

More to the point, last March, Riane Eisler, author of the

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stunning Chalice and the Blade, and the recently released, *The Real Wealth of Nations*, urged a group of women leaders, “to replace stories that perpetuate the domination legends with partnership myths.” Knowingly or not, J.K. Rowling has taken an influential step in this direction.

Although Lord Voldemort is the prototypical arch villain, Rowling counterpoints this caricature by crafting Harry’s development as a reflective, indeed reluctant leader. Harry emerges in the mold of leader defined by Barbara Crosby of the Reflective Leadership Center at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey Institute. Such leadership inspires and mobilizes “others to undertake collective action in pursuit of the common good.” Flying like broomsticks throughout the Potter opus are themes of love, friendship, trust and loyalty, but in the end, the “pursuit of the common good” premise emerges prominently. And, the conceit isn’t overly simplified. Harry and other characters struggle to comprehend what constitutes “common good.” Teenage Harry’s reflective abilities are toughened as he learns that his mentor and hero, Dumbledore, had a youthful misunderstanding of the concept. Harry must not only grasp the nuances of Dumbledore’s transgressions, but also forgive them.

This ability to expose Harry’s fallibility and forgiveness renders *Deathly Hallows* a cut above the retributive pap of so many hero fantasies. Rowling encourages readers to think critically about what makes Harry a hero, what influences his choices. And since literally millions of these readers are juveniles, perhaps some will mature to consider soft power before obliteration as an option.

The parting 17-year-old Harry Potter is imbued with a finer capacity than sword or wand play or sheer magical attainment. Throughout the series he has fiercely sought truth; in this final quest he gains the valuable characteristics of understanding and self-knowledge.

In 1997, business writers Begley and Jacobs defined leadership as “the process of maximizing the capability of people to fulfill purpose through the development of character.” J.K. Rowling has penned an extended bildungsroman: Harry Potter the boy undergoes the requisite conflicts between his needs and those of the society around him, rising like Dumbledore’s phoenix as a more modern hero.

Choosing collaboration over his former preferred isolation to guide his choices, Harry advances his goals. He comes to understand and accept his own and others’ limitations, and overcomes his wavering mistrust of others. In this final episode, Rowling masterfully releases Potter to his potential as “a first among equals” – a *prima inter pares* – thereby producing the ripple effect of allowing others to lead. In fact, another ultimately wields the hero’s sword – it is an ally, not a solitary hero who literally slays the dragon, (well, snake). This real power of Potter is his triumph through partnership.

Old friend, new friend

Tue Feb 26 15:26:00 CST 2008 |
Shelley, Leon, Me with Martijn standing



Just a week and a half ago our dear *old friend, Leon Loos, a Dutchman* who grew up American, returned to his native country to visit family and friends. We were lucky that he put us on his agenda. It had been eight years since he'd visited his homeland, and quite some time since we'd been together in Minneapolis, where we met and shared many an adventure. Leon seems at home wherever he is, so simply hanging out together is a big treat. And this time he brought along his sweetheart, Shelley, who felt right at home as well.

Europeans often freely admit that they mistrust American 'friendliness', finding it shallow or phony. Maybe you have to be an American to recognize that our overt warmth is authentic, probably cultural. Like those big, rolling American vistas, many of us grew up with wide arms, a vast heart, and a propensity to embrace strangers instantly. That's how it felt to be together - wide and warm instantly connecting and reconnecting. This flow is something I sometimes miss here. Many Europeans are more cautious in building their friendships, and even once your mates, they are slightly more conservative in their show of emotions, excluding of course, southern Europeans!

With Martijn more and more able to participate in these visits, the three day stay of Leon and Shelley was relaxed and welcome.

In another two weeks we're expecting a full house for the annual Maastricht TEFAF, the world's largest art and antiquities fair, when David Meyers and Roberta Strickler return for their second visit to our fair town, and David Hyde, arrives for his first.

This past week has been low key due to some colds and other pesky physical ailments for both us. But our outlooks remain bright, getting lighter as the days grow longer.



Connecting and concern

Mon Mar 03 15:39:00 CST 2008 |

Damian and Susan, February 25, 2007

Last week, Damian Gadzinowski, one of my University of Maastricht Master's Programme classmates paid a visit. It had been almost a year since we last met and it was good to catch up. Damian now works for the Warsaw satellite office of the European Institute for Public Administration, (EIPA), where we spent three months of our masters training. Since he's Polish, this means he's back on his own home soil after spending two years working in Brussels. We got to compare notes about work, our private lives and to reminisce about our student days. Its hard to believe that we're coming up to our three year reunion this June.

The past few weeks have been almost other-worldly. Martijn came down with the cold/flu that has decimated Maastricht, and I hear, the rest of the Western world. There are some other issues, too, related to the cancer and the surgery. Martijn has been so well and brave for the past months that it is very hard to see him in any distress. Tomorrow we head back to the clinic for a check up. Fingers crossed.



Make My Day

Tue Mar 04 11:00:00 CST 2008 |

Martijn, Carnival Cowboy, c. 1958, gunning for the bad guys

Cancer doesn't let one become complacent. Martijn, like the little sheriff pictured here, has been vigilant during his recovery, keeping a careful eye out for that 'baddest' of all bad guys, the big CA. So a few weeks ago when a troubling swelling in his impacted groin area hardened, he knew it was time to marshall his medical deputies into a posse. Today, we spent a bit of time back the hospital, AZM, eliminating certain suspects. A big fear of Dr. Keymeulen was that the pressure of the lymph fluid or scar tissue had created thrombosis, hence phlebitis, a life threatening condition all surgeons want to avoid. One echo-gram eliminated that from the suspect list relieving all three of us.

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Now Dr. Keymeulen will convene her colleagues to analyze what steps to take next. Martin's swelling is not a good sign, and it interferes with his comfort and well-being.

Like all good cowboys, Martijn will walk tall and face this culprit head on. And I am his faithful sidekick, there with love, humor and all the support I can muster. As always, we'll keep you posted and as always, keep us in your thoughts, meditations and prayers. 'Giddiup' and go get 'em!

Discouraging News



Fri Mar 07 14:05:00 CST 2008 |

Martijn, February 14, 2008, our 12th anniversary

We were so hopeful just a month ago, but today Dr. Keymeulen confirmed that the cancer has spread to other lymph glands. Next week they will perform a full body scan to determine how far it has spread and what course of action can be undertaken. Lightening the blow today is the presence of our dear friend, David Hyde, visiting from Minneapolis. Dave stayed with us during the long wait at the cancer clinic post echo-gram and biopsy. Devastated describes my mood. We will post more information mid-next week. I almost don't have the heart to ask for your prayers as it feels, well.... But as always, we know you are there with us, and that does ease the terrible burden. Please take the time to tell someone you love, that you love them. Susan



The Last Leaf

Tue Mar 11 10:59:00 CDT 2008 |

William Sydney Porter, known in American Literature as O. Henry (1862-1910) was a prolific American short-story writer, a master of surprise endings, who wrote about the life of ordinary people in New York City. A twist of plot, which turns on an ironic or coincidental circumstance, is typical of O. Henry's stories. One of his most poignant is "The Last Leaf", the tale of painter who in a heroic gesture, saves the life of a character dying of pneumonia who is sure she will die once the last leaf on a trail of ivy outside the window blows

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away in the winter wind. Staying up all night the painter renders a leaf on the wall. She lives but the painter himself dies. Outside our home one of our newly planted thirty foot tall oak trees kept its lower branch of leaves all winter. I watched that cluster of leaves like O. Henry's character, hanging onto hope. Monday a week ago as I threw open our outer shutters I saw in horror that this cluster had finally succumbed to a terrible wind storm. It was the day Martijn asked me to feel the lump in his groin. Would that I could paint a last leaf to endure eternity.



Keep on Smiling

Wed Mar 12 09:23:00 CDT 2008 |

Martijn & his Mother Geri, at her home, March 6, 2008

Martijn, David Meyers, Roberta Strickler, Dave Hyde & Me



March 11, 2008

To understand bravery and spirit you are lucky if you know Martijn. His spirit is larger than most of our imaginations can fathom. It is as limitless as universe after universe. He teaches me about what it means to be a real human being, not a human doing. His first ambition is to make sure that his guests, his friends, his family are okay; then comes himself. Due to plans made just a few short weeks ago when his health was going strong and his strength on the upswing, we invited our dear friends David and Roberta to stay here, coming for TEFAF, the huge art fair held in Maastricht and visiting other places of interest. When our other friend, Dave Hyde, asked if he should stop by on his way from Dubai back to Minneapolis, we said, sure, happily anticipating a houseful of good friends who had a common connection of having lived a long time in Chicago.

So it was with great sadness that Martijn had to bow out of most of our plans as his condition worsened extremely rapidly. Dave arrived on Thursday, the day the entire family celebrated Marcel's 65th birthday. We were pleased to attend and share the joy, but already Martijn was in pain. Dave was perfect company, generously lending his ear and hugs, happily hanging out and just being. Saturday David and Roberta arrived. Originally we were all to meet them in Brussels for a day of sightseeing. Instead Dave served as my escort and the four of us enjoyed an afternoon. But I was eager to return home and so we had a nice dinner all together with Martijn. Sunday Barbara Greenberg and Pawel Kromholz had all of us for a big family style dinner at their home/art studio. Martijn joined but was greatly relieved to be back home that night. Monday only the four of us attended TEFAF, and Tuesday we cancelled a special dinner out while David and Roberta prepared a risotto and chicken feast.

Our visitors left today in a very poignant goodbye to Martijn. His condition is deteriorating almost by the day. Although he

is keeping his brave face, the cancer has spread and most distressing, now his appetite is gone – the most dangerous thing that can happen in these cases. His medical doctor comes this evening to conduct a physical exam while we wait for the hospital to receive a certain chemical to conduct a full body scan to determine where and how many organs now are invaded.

There is no good news here. The worse situation for me is seeing Martijn in real pain and distress. I will continue with my work for ECDPM since it doesn't do any good for me to simply sit by, but as you can imagine this is a depressing and aching sad time for us. Thank you for your comments, wishes, emails, love and support. Susan

Savoring the Moments



Fri Mar 14 04:34:00 CDT 2008 |
Marcel celebrates 65 hard won years, March 6, 2008

Aunt Eneke, Uncle Jan, Marcel and Aunt Sus

Here our family gathers in the cozy glow of my mother-in-law's living room, enjoying traditional Limburg vlaai (pie) and conversation.



There aren't sufficient words to describe the love, attention, affection and support provided by Marcel Winten, my mother-in-law, Geri's life partner. It almost is possible to overlook his steady presence in our extended family because Marcel prefers to inhabit the background in his quiet and self-effacing way. But he is truly the rock upon which our family is anchored. It was fortunate that Dave Hyde's arrival coincided with the traditional Dutch family-style celebration of Marcel's special birthday so that he could experience this most quintessential Dutch treat.



Dave Hyde, David Meyers and Roberta Strickler, March 11, 2007

In a more traditional American moment, our great friends invade our kitchen to cook up some chicken and risotto magic. Martijn was ailing so we cancelled our fancy dinner reservations for this goodbye dinner to our guests as they took over all preparations and clean-up.



Maastricht's best kept secret- 5 star Schaefer-Hermse Restaurant Ceramique!



Who needs cramped seating and bothersome European smokers during an exquisite dinner? Not our happy crew.

The Reading Room

A moment of restful reflection as Martijn, Dave and David contemplate world affairs in our relaxing 'reading room'.



In these days of doubt and fear for the future of Martin's health we try to savor each day. Illness sometimes robs us of the joys of life. It is then critical that within capacity we live each day to its fullest. Enjoying the love and support of our family and friends eases the strain of focusing on the life-robbing cancer; rather, we are able to escape into the richness that their presence offers. Surely this extends the healing process.

Zero Gravity

Sun Mar 16 16:36:00 CDT 2008 |

Martijn, awaited the new zero gravity chairs with his leg elevated the old fashioned way!



Good friend, Trish, tries one out. Lift off!

Martijn with Chris, cozy in the new chairs



Sometimes the best tact is to simply hang in there. While we await news from the hospital regarding the upcoming PET/Cat Scan availability, we just keep moving forward... or hanging upside down! A while back it was suggested the very best position for Martijn is with his feet elevated above his head due the condition of his lymph glands. After a lengthy search we discovered "The Perfect Chair" or the Zero Gravity chair which allows the user to recline much as an astronaut during launch reducing pressure to the spine and keeping the legs above the heart. Thanks to a very nice team at a furniture store in Aachen, Germany named Sequoia, we were able to import these beauties, made in Thailand, shipped from California to Germany to the Netherlands. Trish stopped by for a visit this past Friday and got to sample one. Today Martijn spent quality time with a close friend, Chris, from his university days. With so much in the balance it is simply marvelous to hang out with good

friends. Our new chairs make visits more fun. Come try one.

Martin's Reflections and Waiting for Tests



Wed Mar 19 05:58:00 CDT 2008 |

Martijn in January 2008, cafe atop the V&D department store, Maastricht



Life surely is one moment at a time. Here we are savoring our small, precious moments of day-to-day activities. Martijn, thanks to the timely intervention of our wonderful general practitioner (huisarts), Dr. Maurice Bom, is feeling more comfortable. Maurice paid a house call last Wednesday evening, the day our guests, Dave, David and Roberta departed. Two simple prescriptions, one to help relieve constipation, the other to reduce the swelling caused by the tumor, have made a big difference. Martin's appetite has returned and he is determined to keep his weight up. This is important and good.

The long waits for more tests, however, are not good. We are now scheduled for his PET/CT (cat) scan combination on March 28th. The biopsy was more than a week ago confirming that the cancer had returned. Now another long wait. These delays shake my beliefs that everything happens for a purpose - to teach us something. Rather I feel anxious and unhappy that we are forced to wait.

Yet, yesterday, a day filled with business related activities for me, I asked Martijn to begin to write me small notes with his famous, delightful illustrations (bet you didn't know about his drawing). Our intention is to build a small log of our feelings during this time. Yesterday's note contained a cute drawing of a cat face from a cushion we have that nestles on the couch in his study, and his reflection that: "I feel very calm and I think it has to do with my philosophy background." As always he enjoyed the stillness around him, but I was grateful to know that was made pleasurable with "the expectation that you will soon will come back and fill the space with another voice...." I share these feelings. I inhabit this space so happily with the knowledge of Martin's quiet presence in another room. It is impossible to imagine it otherwise.



White Easter 2008

Mon Mar 24 08:47:00 CDT 2008 |

Uncommon White Easter Monday, March 24, 2008, from our second story balcony



Martijn visits with brothers, Noel, Jan, and sisters-in-law, Irma and Leah, Good Friday, March 21st



Brother Noel gazes with Leiven as T'jeu talks with Uncle Martijn

We were blessed this holiday weekend by getting to spend quality time with Martin's brother Jan, wife Irma and sons, Matthieu, known as T'jeu [pronounced T'chew] and Leiven, who live in Amersfoort nearby Amsterdam, as well as with his youngest brother, Noel and his wife, Leah, who live in Maastricht but haven't been part of family gatherings for over two years. Reconciliations are healing and holy. So Good Friday was really good.

The Thursday evening before good friends Frank and Jacqueline stopped by for gossip and conversation. Frank and Jan are old school day chums and Frank has adopted us into his own warm and encompassing circle. Jacqueline was a major part of moving in to this building a year ago, taking over the painting and generally helping us to settle in. Saturday, good buddy Maurice Schoffelen transported me to an office center outlet to happily shop for my favorite things, like paper clips and hanging folders while Jan returned for a more private visit with his big brother. That night we entertained friends Yuri and Steven whom we haven't seen in almost a year. They divide their time between homes here in Maastricht, San Francisco and now, their newest abode in Brussels.

Sunday, Easter Day, we enjoyed a quiet dinner at my mother-in-law, Geri's along with Marcel, Noel and Leah. But Martijn was feeling peaky and we left early. His pain has increased as has his overall discomfort in sitting, walking or laying. I'm generally trying to hold my own faltering emotions in check, now struggling to fight back bleak thoughts, instead trying to

enjoy these moments since they are the only thing that is real in my otherwise abstract thought landscape. Mostly Martijn and I enjoy very quiet time together in this wonderful house. I'm very grateful that my work for ECDPM can mostly be done from here allowing us to continue to be together. Tomorrow I head to The Hague, about a two and a half hour train trip, to meet the officials in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs who are major funders of ECDPM. Specifically I'll interview the Director General of International Cooperation, who plays an important part of the Ministry's development activities.

Disturbing Results



Tue Apr 01 14:17:00 CDT 2008 |

Martijn catches a quiet read in my study a week ago

It is April 1st but there weren't any jokes for us today. Martijn is back in the hospital this evening waiting for emergency surgery tomorrow on his right kidney. The PET/CT scan revealed that the cancer has spread to his lymph system at and above the groin. One large tumor so obstructed his right kidney that it failed, leaking urine into his body cavity. They will catheterize that kidney tomorrow resulting in what the urologist called a permanent situation. The catheter will puncture his back, hopefully draining and possibly bringing back to function to that kidney. There is another large tumor in his pelvis and metastasis in his liver. The urologist, Dr. Stijns, said that if they could resuscitate his right kidney he would be able to handle chemotherapy if the medical oncologist decides there is a treatment.

I write these words as though they are normal to write. Nothing is normal. It is extraordinarily surreal. I want to wake from this dream but my little heart knows it doesn't happen like that.

Martijn, as always, was in great spirits, though the gravity of the news hadn't time to set in before we were whisked from the cancer to the urology clinic and finally the nursing floor. I dashed back home by bus to pack his soft 'jammies and a few essentials, returning with his mother, Geri and our steadfast Marcel. Keep us, as always in your thoughts, meditations and prayers.



Bringing him home

Wed Apr 02 14:11:00 CDT 2008 |

Martin's bird tells all. Drawn today at the azM (hospital)

There was no surgery today. After a very difficult series of meetings with a series of our doctors - from our trusted oncological surgeon, Kristien Keymeulen, M.D., to the urologist, Dr. Stijns, M.D., to our dear general practitioner, Maurice Bom, M.D., and finally to the previously unknown medical oncologist, we were given a grim prognosis. The cancer has spread too rapidly and widely to treat in any way. The tumors threaten kidney, bladder and liver.

Chemotherapy requires a relatively healthy person and two functioning kidneys. Martijn is not in shape to undergo such a procedure. The proposed kidney 'puncture' and drain could have caused much discomfort for too little long-term gain - or worse.

We are planning to live together as best as we can the rest of our remaining time at home. If that is possible. Tomorrow Dr. Bom will come to discuss the plan. It will not be easy - one tumor already is externally protruding and could rupture at any time. I'm so sorry to say no optimistic words at present. I am telling in this blog the same grim reality we face. We cried a lot today. You understand, I'm sure. We laughed, we talked about people we love, trips we've taken and in general a love we believe transcends space and time. I agonize over Martijn not having unnecessary pain and know that we will discuss this and plan for it. I equally agonize over keeping my grace, even now my tummy is in a huge knot and I feel ill.

But beyond it, beyond it all, we face this inevitable conclusion surrounded by radiant light and love. We feel your support over time and space. We are so grateful for this strange, virtual community and what it brings, as though it is as tangible as a sip of water to quench thirst. We hope you can truly understand and appreciate what your connection to us means.

Thanks to the discerning ear of my dear friend, Dr. David Meyers, who with wife, Roberta, was with us a few short weeks ago, I learned of Irish poet, philosopher and scholar, John O'Donohue, who died peacefully in his sleep at age 52

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this past January. O'Donohue was interviewed shortly before his untimely death on a wonderful program, *Speaking of Faith*, hosted by Krista Tippett, from American Public Media, a weekly conversation about belief, meaning, ethics, and ideas. The program and this poet couldn't have entered my life at more poignant moment. Here is "A Blessing for Death" from John O'Donohue's book *Anam Cara*, meaning 'soul friend'.

A Blessing for Death

I pray that you will have the blessing of being consoled and sure about your own death.

May you know in your soul that there is no need to be afraid.

When your time comes, may you be given every blessing
and shelter that you need.

May there be a beautiful welcome for you in the home that
you are going to.

You are not going somewhere strange. You are going back to
the home that you never left.

May you have a wonderful urgency to live your life to the
full.

May you live compassionately and creatively and transfigure
everything this is negative within you and about you.

When you come to die may it be after a long life.

May you be peaceful and happy and in the presence of those who really care for
you.

May your going be sheltered and your welcome assured.

May your soul smile in the embrace of your *anam cara*.



Trains, dreams, friendship

Sun Apr 06 16:02:00 CDT 2008 |

Martijn admires a model train exhibit on March 30th

This was his last outside walk before the lymph edema swelled his left leg beyond capability to take a walk. He loves trains and this painful trek was worthwhile. Look at that smile.



Barbara Greenberg outdoes herself again, baking Susan a spectacular chocolate birthday cake. Saturday was my birthday.



The best present I could think of was to buy us a comfortable, practical bed that will keep Martin's painful leg raised. *Here is the bed set-up team surrounding a smiling Martijn: his brother Janus, Olena Breyman and Maurice Schoffelen.* Getting these electronic beds up a staircase and set up was a yeoman's work.



But our hardworking team enjoyed the rewards of seeing these two bedbugs together. We hope that having these electronic beds will allow us to stay next to each other as our journey continues.

With Martijn perched in his zero-gravity chair across the room, our hard working bed-team joined by Ursula Glunk (front right) and Krista Knopper (under the artwork) for tea and Barbara's birthday cake.



Martijn and I try to keep our spirits. We face this journey with full knowledge that these are our precious final days together. We have been consulted by our wonderful general practitioner, Maurice Bom, who has been compassionate and honest in delivering the information of what we can expect as time passes. We are aware of various palliative treatments that should keep Martijn comfortable and pain free. Although this knowledge is shocking, we try to keep on living and loving since that seems the sane thing to do. We have had expected breakdowns filled with tears, and this is so good, so natural, so bonding. I have asked and Martijn has agreed to write me ten little stories from our cats point of view and to illustrate with his wonderful drawings. Tonight, at dinner at his mother's, she asked that we record his voice. I was touched to tears by this since it is his voice I

think I shall miss the most. That gentle voice filled with wisdom and mirth and corny jokes and deep thoughts. We are trying to discuss the weighty items that need our attention but this we find perhaps very difficult to do. And part of this is how and when to allow friends to visit without taxing our fragile cocoon. We shall do our best to do this well. I feel more and more embarrassed that people think I'm strong about all this. In my private moments I rant and wail, shaking like a leaf in a terrible storm at the pain and loneliness I already sense. I have no idea how my emotions will be minute to minute. It is Martijn who centers me and what will happen when that needle no longer points a better way?



Martijn Reads a Minnetonka Cat Tale

Tue Apr 08 11:23:00 CDT 2008 |

I asked Martijn to write me stories from the point of view of our beloved cats, Yin, Yang and Snoepje (Snoop-yea). Here he is lying comfortably on the couch in his cozy study reading Tale 2. We hope you enjoy it. Remember creativity and love last for all eternity! (Video on blog).

Take Time to Memorize Each Other

Wed Apr 09 08:19:00 CDT 2008 |

Monday, April 7th, Sister Elle visits.



Martin's lymph therapist, Eric Breuer, plays Frankenstein. Eric is trained in the newly evolving field of lymph therapy. After massage to push the lymph fluid up to the belly area where it can be better absorbed by the body, Eric gently wraps Martin's leg in special bandages. The swelling and the pain are greatly reduced by this procedure.



At lunchtime, one of Martin's oldest, dearest friends from his university days, Wijnand van Lieshout, arrives for a day long visit. Martijn wanted to discuss text from Ludwig Binswanger, a Swiss psychiatrist and pioneer in the field of existential psychology with Wijnand, who is an expert on his work. Martijn admires Binswanger's theories on eternal love and wants to use selected text for his memorial service. What a gift for these two 'eternal' friends to have a day to discuss love and friendship in quiet harmony. What a privilege for me to be quietly working on my own in the glow of the environment they create.

I take to heart what our dear friends, David Fey and Michael Putman, who will arrive to stay with us in 10 days, wrote recently as a comment on this blog: Walk it bravely and in love, holding hands and being in the "now" with each other. Cherish it...and as a lyric from a Josh Groban song ... goes... take the time to memorize each other.

Now is the time for quiet meetings, for thoughtful contemplations about the transcendence of love, for meaningful embraces and acknowledgments of the many friendships and kindnesses shown throughout a lifetime...a too short one. And for me, as I try to do my best to be present, to do my work, to be a caregiver to my beloved, it is truly the time to memorize each other.



Martijn Reads a Minnetonka Cat Tale 3

Fri Apr 11 06:02:00 CDT 2008 |

More adventures of Yin, Yang and sister Snoepje. Written by Martijn Hermse for his beloved wife, Susan Schaefer during this mysterious passage of our lives.



Baby Snoepje, big owl face, casts a big shadow at home in Cottagewood, on Lake Minnetonka

The inscrutable Mr. Yin, on deck in Cottagewood, Lake Minnetonka



The laid-back Mr. Yang, on deck, in Cottagewood, Lake Minnetonka

We thank everyone who continues to read, watch, write comments, send real mail and email. It lets us know we are not alone and are surrounded by light, love and support.



Not Alone

Sun Apr 20 15:27:00 CDT 2008 |

Marcel and Mother, Geri, a quiet dinner with us last Sunday, April 13th



Maurice Bom, our doctor, visits on Monday, April 14th



Maurice consults with Martijn

It's been a while since I wrote. We've had a mostly good week. At present, Martijn is in a slightly stronger 'chi' pattern, I think influenced greatly by his lymph therapy sessions. On the other hand, his visage is greyer, and he tires a bit more easily. Still, he's mobile and doing things, in a limited way, that he enjoys – making his own breakfast and lunch and lots and lots of reading and writing.

Still, the pain is increasing and I imagine the cancer spreading, albeit at its own sinister pace. We have no extra help at present due to the situation I describe, but our general practitioner has a palliative team on hand for the changes sure to come.

I am now seeing a therapist weekly and she's a great help. She works with grief and is based in the Toon Hermans 'Huis' - the national Dutch cancer support organization that has lovely houses throughout the Netherlands offering such counseling, cooking lessons, art sessions, massage and other services all aimed at helping cancer patients and family through this journey.

I'm trying as best I can to be and keep present, enjoying Martin's company, while still bracing myself for the awful realities I will endure in the days to come. I have ridden a full spectrum of emotions this week, but mostly managed to keep one foot in front of the other.

Yesterday dear friends from Martin's university days, Werner and Henk, stayed for the afternoon and evening. We

celebrated a sort of makeshift Passover, although with Indonesian food substituting for a traditional seder dinner. Today David and Michael arrived from Minneapolis. It is so good to have them here. We spent a very quiet afternoon filled with laughter and tears. Martijn wants everyone to know he doesn't feel alone.



Full Sun

Sun Apr 27 05:54:00 CDT 2008 |

Martijn shares a spot of sun on Saturday, April 26th.

Using all his grit and determination we walked the three blocks to the River Meuse on a sunny Saturday afternoon to enjoy sun, bird songs and each other.



In his mother's back garden on her 77th birthday, Wednesday, April 23rd with sister-in-law, Leah and brother Noel.



Marcel, brother-in-law Paul and sister Elly joined in for Geri's birthday celebration.



The Two of Us

Wed Apr 30 08:15:00 CDT 2008 |

*The two of us, still crazy in love, by the River Muse,
Tuesday, April 15, 2008.*

Martijn and I honor our vows to love, honor and cherish each other, in sickness and health....I am heartened by my husband's strength of character, intellect and spirit. His pain from the growing tumors is increasing, yet he cherishes each new day for what it brings. Still able to walk, albeit very very slowly, we try to journey the three (now long) blocks to our spot by the river.

Martijn likes to make his own breakfast, since standing gives him relief from the increasing pain of sitting or even laying on his back. Our doctor, Maurice Bom, typically makes a house call twice a week; his palliative nurse, Vincent Janssen, comes also twice weekly. They are working with Martijn on a pain medication dose that fits his need to stay fully lucid and clear.

One of our dear neighbors, Dirk Peek, happens to have been Martin's anesthesiologist during his surgery, and is one of the leaders of the pain clinic at the hospital. On his own time he checked in with us this weekend assuring us that he is available to collaborate with Maurice Bom should Martijn need additional advice. We also are meeting with a wonderful progressive retired priest, Carel van Tulden, as we plan Martin's memorial service, which will truly be a celebration of his life.

But I am in a different kind of pain for which no medication can help. It is a pain I acknowledge and endure, knowing full well that I am already in mourning a loss of a love that will never be replaced. Through the Toon Herman's "Huis" (house), the Netherlands cancer support organization, I am working with a wonderful therapist whom I see weekly. Alfed van der Aa, trained also in the US, helps me to cope with the natural grief I already feel. Martin's condition and inevitable death weigh like a lead ball in the pit of my stomach. My old vitality and zest for life is currently subdued and I am in a heightened awareness of the joy I experience at his physical presence, his touch, his voice, his smile, his laughter. I memorize these times yet, naturally, grieve their eventual departure. Sure there will be the transformative love

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everlasting between us. I know this, I feel and believe in this. But I remain flesh and blood and so am aware of my loss.

I told Alied that I must be depressed. And she said something so simple yet so profound that now, even in my deepest sadness, comforts me. She said: "Depression is an abnormal reaction to normal events; grief is a normal reaction to abnormal events." Martijn and I should be looking forward to the best years of our life together. It is terribly abnormal that he departs me so prematurely. I am in grief.



Poignant Plans

Tue May 06 15:13:00 CDT 2008 |

My American 'brothers', David Fey & Michael Putman traveled to Maastricht in late April to offer support and love. They stayed with us for a few days before heading to Amsterdam and back home to Minneapolis. It was a most meaningful visit. David stayed with me for a week when Martijn underwent surgery in October; Michael actually got his very passport and made his very first visit outside North American for this occasion.



Father Carel van Tulder, a retired Jesuit priest, will facilitate the memorial service for Martijn. We've been meeting regularly. Carel is comforting and grounding for us. He is open to our ideas for the service and says he is amazed at how centered we seem to be. We are grateful that he is in our circle.



Werner, Martin's dear friend from university days, and his partner Henk, spend some time with us a few weeks back.



Therese and Rob Frank enjoy a spot of sun in our courtyard. They go back to Martin's university days, the same time he knew Werner.

It has been an emotionally draining time for me. Martijn, thankfully, continues to be comfortable, but in the past weeks we've begun to finalize the plans for the memorial service, funeral, and cemetery. In each case there has been a bittersweet poignancy in the activities.

Martijn and I treat each subject with love and respect, even making jokes and being lighthearted. And the various individuals, like Father van Tulder, who are involved fill my heart with gratitude.

Yesterday we chose the location for the memorial service, which will be the stunning St. Jan's Kerk in the literal middle of Maastricht - its center square, the Vrijthof. Both Martijn and I were pleased to learn it is available and has all the features we wanted - central location, beautiful interior, ample seating and excellent musical facilities. Our beloved friend, Herman Rouw, has agreed to play and organize the music. Herman is world class conductor, composer and pianist, but most important, he is our dear friend. He has also

The Earth Shall Claim Your Limbs: Martijn's Journey With Anal Cancer

agreed to accompany one of my newer friends, Pia Brand, who works with me at ECDPM. Pia has kindly offered to sing the moving song, "Beloved Wife", by Natalie Merchant, a tribute of one spouse to the other. Martijn and I love this song and have agreed it will end the service.

We also selected the location where the Dutch coffee table will take place - the fortress that sits atop Maastricht. This is the typical gathering here that follows the funeral. The church and this fort are places Martijn and I love and so have a lot of meaning. Yesterday we also selected the coffin and today, our dear friend Maurice Schoffelen accompanied me as I drove in my new car share to the cemetery that Martijn asked me to check. It is where his grandfather Martijn Mullens rests. By coincidence the caretaker was available and I was able to secure the spot to the right of his grandfather and grandmother's gravesite. Our good friend, Frank Koekenbaker, "Cookie", visited with Martijn while we made these arrangements.

As you may imagine these are details that must be attended to. And while we are both grateful that Martijn can make the arrangements as he prefers, it has taken all of my equilibrium to do these things with grace. Tonight, Ursula stopped by with Martin's favorite newspapers and some special treats from her native Blackforest in Germany, and the wonderful owners of our favorite Maastricht restaurant, Le Courage, prepared and delivered a lovely dinner requested by Martijn - sweetbreads with grilled potatoes and veggies. We feasted as we often do, watching the Australian television series, "McLeod's Daughters". Our poignant plans now underway, hopefully we can enjoy each day that we have left.



Philadelphia Brigade Brightens My Grief

Thu May 15 03:22:00 CDT 2008 |

Sisters Kate & Alex Tasch arrive in Maastricht on Friday, May 9, 2008, bringing their special brand of comfort, care and fun!



Busted? No. Great friend Maurice Schoffelen isn't locking the girls up, but merely offering his back of the van transport as Alex and Kate head to our friend Jacqueline Braun's bed & breakfast located a tad too far for walking from our home in Centre Ceramique. We've decided it is best for our guests not to stay with us at this time to preserve the most peace and quiet for Martijn and me.



On Saturday, May 10th, Martijn accepted an invitation to spend a few hours at his mother's cabin located 20 minutes away in Lanaken, Belgium by car. *Maurice thought it would be nice to show K&A nearby Valkenburg*, Limburg's equivalent of New Jersey's Wildwood. Very touristy. We walked the town, viewed the ruins, rode the ski lift to the tower on the hill and ate fattening 'biter balen' the local answer to Philly cheesesteaks. Heavy on calories and taste!



Alex, Maurice and Kate pick up sticks on a short hike through Valkenburg's woods. Total twiggies.

When Kate and Alex wrote that they would like to visit Martijn and me I felt overwhelmed with gratitude. You see, the Tasch family was my first 'official' adopted family. Their father, Peter, became my first 'real' employer in 1969, when, as a work-study student at Temple University I became the Office Administrator for the scholarly journal, The Scriblerian, which Peter edited and managed with two other colleagues. I worked for Peter for three years, during which time his wife, Alison, who also taught in Temple's English department where I was a student, and their three children, Jeremy, Kate and Alex, became my first 'family' of choice. It is a relationship I've maintained and cherished over the past 40 years. In fact, when I ran my Philadelphia Public Relations Firm, Ingram & Picker, Alex became one of our first intern's, making the cycle full.

Their visit opened a window of my soul letting some light into

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the darkness that currently dwells there. My grief of late has lodged deep and wide. Even as Martijn proves his mettle by his heroic ability to tough out his pain and keep up his overwhelming good humor, even as he labors to do the small things for himself he is able to do, I mourn my upcoming loss. Just this determination, just this magic display of character, though also intended to help me in my daily routines by keeping independent as long as he can, seems to intensify my impending sense of loss. I WILL MISS MARTIJN ENTIRELY BECAUSE OF HIS SPIRIT.

While I know the 'ruling' zen wisdom is to accept each day we still have and to cherish it, I admit to you that I mostly dwell in deep despair at my own sense of loss. And, I am not ashamed nor remorseful about this. It is what I feel. I am neither wallowing in sadness nor looking for sympathy - only marking my own reality to share with you.

Mostly when I'm with Martijn, I do not feel this despair. It is only when I'm alone - when he's sleeping or resting upstairs or I'm in the shower or washing up dishes. Also, when I'm out and about Maastricht. Maastricht is Martijn for me.

So, it was with supreme gratitude that I found being out and about with Kate and Alex, along with our dear steady 'tour guide' Maurice, that I felt lighter for the first time in a long while. Sharing our long and mutual Philadelphia-based history was a panacea for my ills. Identifying landmarks like the Wissahickon Trail in the Germantown section of Philly where we were neighbors for many years, or sharing snatches of history like the big English Department parties hosted by their parents in my carefree student days, filled me with a sweet succor of long term friendship.

We didn't run out of stories or reminiscences during the entire weekend of their visit. And the icing on the cake was spending Mother's Day with two young women who feel like my own daughters.

There is much more to tell about Kate and Alex and the wonderful Tasch family. Like Kate's own role as caretaker for her partner, Michele during her frightening bouts with leukemia, or Alex's recent scare with a burst appendix, or the time Martijn and I stayed in a funny, funky Manhattan apartment of Alex's former boss, or the huge party hosted by Peter and Alison for me when Temple University honored me with a distinguish humanities award, or Peter and Alison's current struggle with the Parkinson's disease that is ravaging their lives. So much history and so much love.

So, I have found a lasting 'afterburn' from their visit that is helping me back on track to enjoy Martin's enduring love and company now. What a great gift.

Complications

Sun May 18 04:26:00 CDT 2008 |

Standing strong together, Mother's Day, May 11, 2008 in our home.



Martijn reads in our outer courtyard on Monday, May 5th.



Yesterday, May 17th, Martijn suffered a 'setback' in his well being. He has developed a painful thrombosis – an anticipated side effect of his increasing immobility. We had an emergency visit by our lovely doctor, Dr. Bom, last night. Martijn will now be receiving injections to thin his blood and have his leg wrapped. This will decrease his mobility but hopefully this will only be a temporary setback with the proper treatment and rest.



Care Giving: Perspectives

Sun May 25 08:25:00 CDT 2008 |

Martijn rests on Thursday in his study on his day bed reading "Night Train to Lisbon".



Nurse Ans wraps to contain the thrombosis

HIS

It was a horrific week for Martijn. It began on Saturday, May 17th when his right leg swelled painfully to twice its size. This swelling was different than that associated with the lymph symptoms, so we called Dr. Bom that evening. He responded quickly assessing the situation as thrombosis and calling a specialist with the symptoms and medical history to confirm his suspicions. Normally a patient would go to hospital for tests, but given Martijn's condition everyone agreed to proceed. Dr. Bom ordered injections of blood thinner, which he administered that evening, and wrapping material used to treat thrombosis.

The next day our old home care team from 'Green Cross' began their work with us as they had post operatively last fall. Nurse Ans arrived Sunday to wrap carefully Martijn's affected leg and continue with the injections. Monday one nurse bathed him while another team checked the wrapping and yet another came for the now nightly injections.

But other complications surfaced: constipation and urination problems. Dr. Bom ordered stool softeners for the former and what is called a condom catheter for the latter. But by Thursday Martijn's abdomen was painfully distended in spite of the fact that the thrombosis swelling in his leg was decreasing. Thursday evening I asked Dr. Bom to come to check his abdomen – his renewed assessment was bladder blockage. Again the night pharmacy delivered and after a 'real' catheterization Martijn began to flow again.

What a difference – by Friday his bladder was functioning as well as his bowels. Appetite returned. His color and energy returned. And for the time being we feel that he has stabilized. During this time of distress Martijn kept his constant centered disposition, but the episode has taken a great toll on his energy.

MINE

And on mine. During this latest period the cumulative care giving has taken a toll on my energy. I have managed, up until now, to regroup after previous roller coaster effects, but not this time. Even with my brother-in-law, Janus, agreeing to come to administer to Martijn all day this past Wednesday so that I could attend a mixed business and pleasure team-building outing with my Knowledge Management colleagues from ECDPM.

I have slipped a notch. Thursday I met with Alied van der Aa, my therapist, and we agreed that I would begin a more formal and rigorous attempt to schedule extra help for me. While Green Cross takes good medical care of Martijn, I still must be here to change his wound bandages twice a day (the tumor in his groin that is external), empty his catheter bag regularly, make and serve breakfast, lunch and dinner every day, put on and take off his clothing twice a day, and direct the various nurses on where to find what. On top of this, since we have no Dutch benefits, I have tried to continue to work, although mostly from home. Nevertheless, you can imagine the stress and strain to focus. Hopefully, this week I will work with Alied to turn the tide. Brother-in-law, Janus and my sister-in-law, Elly, will rotate taking one full day a week to be here with their brother. My mother-in-law already comes on Sundays bringing home cooking. Maurice Schoffelen has been coming on Wednesday evenings regularly. Now I will try to find others to cook at least five days a week, taking at least that pressure off of me.

Physical pressure is only a part of it, though. It feels as if I've been a social outcast for a very long time now. I, who typically am so socially inclined, have been incredibly isolated for almost 16 months. It may seem we've had many guests but please don't confuse this with leading a happy, balanced social life. I hardly visit outside the house and when I do I mostly want to return to be with Martijn. It is impossible to feel good about outside events when my heart is breaking. Which is the other part of this ordeal – how very sad it is to see your beloved in pain and literally breaking down on a daily basis. This sense of loss is palpable. The good news is that I'm very aware of my grief and mourning – not stuffing feelings or hiding from the pain. Nor am I wallowing in it. I know and recognize the loss I'm suffering for just what it is – a monumental loss. My life as we lived it is gone, and has been so for over a year.

OURS

And, the life we anticipated is gone as well. No retirement together living in this soft green landscape and traveling the world. No leisure time with family and friends, watching each other grow old. No more quiet evenings just hanging out, ribbiting and croaking for joy. No more back scratches or walks along the River Meuse.

What is here now, though, is an existence that is as sweet as it is bitter, maybe sweeter than that.

I have been given a rare gift, to spend Martijn's final days together, hopefully providing him what he wants and needs. I have the fortunate circumstances where I can be with my sweet philosopher frog in our own home, in his own hometown, surrounded by his loving family with his longest-term friends nearby. We have loving and caring friends, my angels, who fly in from here and there, in person and virtually, to care for both of us as best they can. Thanks to the Toon Hermans Huis, we have learned of many resources available to us including finding Dr. Bom, Alied and others. And, although I am scraping the bottom of my savings, at least my years of work have allowed me to put away for a rainy day. So, in spite of the fact that we have absolutely no benefits from the Dutch government, we still have lovely home and can afford the medical insurance that provides for us in this time of dire need. And, as long as I can continue, I have work.

It still remains impossible to conceive that Martijn will not walk among us. His strength of spirit and his ongoing physical prowess in the face of so much deterioration speaks volumes about the care he took of his body, mind and spirit before this cancer felled him. Nothing will replace the love, gentleness, the spark that our relationship brings me – but I will always know we walked completely together in sickness and health, in joy and sadness, 'til death do us part.



Susan in a real "Poodle Dress" with father, Jack B. and mother, Emma, 1953.

Flash back

Wed May 28 16:21:00 CDT 2008 |

I wrote the following poem for my beloved father Jack as he lay dying in a hospital across from a lovely lake in Sanford, Florida. Dad died a courageous and graceful death from prostrate cancer. Like Martijn he kept his wits and humor about him until the very end. I think my love for Martijn stems in many respects from my love for my father who wanted to protect me from anything harmful. I hope you like my poem:

One Light
slowly slipping from me
your spark
that seminal flame that lit me into being
and lights me still

is flickering
fading
slowly
your silver sheen pales
yet

I shine for you
in crystal tears
of parting
in golden comfort
of knowing
you'll glow hereafter
you'll glimmer
here
in me
father

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Collected Poems*



13 years ago today

Sun Jun 01 16:05:00 CDT 2008 |

A quiet cuddle to celebrate our 13th year anniversary of meeting after the many visits of the past days. This is how we used to fall asleep every night - tell me, what could replace this?



Today we met Helena and knew what divinity means. *Dear friend, artist and magus, Sebastian Holzhuber, brought along his muse, to help us celebrate our 13th year anniversary of meeting.* Martijn was one of Sebastian's earliest models for his unique tribal art works. He brought Martijn a book of his collected works including the 'banquet series' where Martijn first posed. Sebastian conducts rituals to help individuals make transitions through art and creativity.



Yvonne, Dorothe, Fulco, and Aad flank Martijn. These friends go back 30 years to when Martijn was a member of the Pax Christie walking group. Last year Aad and Martijn helped to arrange a 30 year anniversary for their group and were astounded and pleased when everyone showed up!

Martijn and I met at his apartment in the Eastern Haborlands of Amsterdam 13 years ago today on June 1st. It's a wonderful story of coincidence and irony that forged a bond that's not been broken since that day. An important link in our chain is the Chizek/Frederick families of Iowa. Rob Chizek was my best friend during this time of my life and through me he ended up staying with Martijn. When I arrived in Amsterdam Rob and I stayed at Martin's flat. The very first week I was there Rob's sister Nancy Frederick, husband David and then teenage children, Tanna and Nate, arrived for their first trip ever to Europe. We held a two-day party at Martin's. Nancy wrote to us this evening. Here is her account of those days:

*Dear Suze and Martijn,
Suze, your poem was absolutely beautiful! Thank you for sharing it. I have been wanting to write both of you for some time to tell you how much you are in my thoughts and in my heart. I love your blog site.....it is so wonderful for me to know what is happening in your lives and all of your thoughts and feelings as you pass through these transitions. Again, I thank you for being so generous as to share*

yourselves with me.

Though our paths have crossed only occasionally in the last few years, I still think about the memories I have with the two of you and I will embrace those forever.

Martijn, I still think about how kind and warm you were to open up your home and your heart to David, Tanna, Nathaniel and I when we came to Amsterdam! I remember you greeting us at the door of your "flat" in Amsterdam and giving us those wonderful, cozy slippers to wear...I felt so nurtured and welcome. And how you provided a wonderful party for us and we drank every bottle of wine you owned and had a marvelous time! I remember eating the herring and you showing us how to let them slide down our throats and then follow them with a bit of spirits. And I remember how you graciously escorted us on the bus back to our hotel at 5 am because you were concerned we wouldn't be able to find our way back on our own..... which was very true. And I will never forget how your little Suzie frog looked at you that night at the party and exclaimed, "You look like someone I could have really gone for in the 60's!" (or something to that effect). Anyway, that seemed to be the beginning of your beautiful relationship...it was wonderful to be a part of that. Thank you.

Something else that I wanted to tell you Martijn is that I don't think in my 57 years of life that I have met a person as warm and caring and gentle as you....you epitomize what Abraham Maslow would describe as "self-actualized". I have always wanted to be able to honor someone with that term of "self-actualization" and now I can. Of course you are also very humble so will not accept the title.....but to me the title is yours. I thank you for sharing your beautiful mind and spirit with me and all of my family over the years, Martijn...how very fortunate for us to have had you in our lives! May this precious time that you and Suzie are sharing be filled with the splendor of life and the tenderness of love!

Please take care.

Much love and admiration,

Nancy

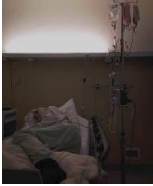
Nancy, thank you for the best anniversary gift of all.



Transfusion

Fri Jun 06 09:03:00 CDT 2008 |

Wheels in motion. Courtesy of Dr. Bom, *Martijn is transported to our hospital, azM, for a blood transfusion on Thursday, June 5th.* The sudden decision came after a look at his low hemoglobin.



Fill 'er Up! The transfusion took almost 6 hours. The hoped for outcome is renewed energy. Martin's life quality has declined precipitously since the thrombosis occurred on May 17th. He can no longer walk. He is much much weaker overall. Because he doesn't choose to ramp up his pain medicine, totally his own choice, his discomfort is obvious. It is so understandable that he doesn't wish to lose any more 'control' which he thinks will happen with increased pain medication. Yet, his trusted advisors tell him that the new pain 'patches' administer low enough doses so that he can control, to an extent, the result.

We have been blessed by a rally of care. Thanks to Allied [Aah-LEET], my therapist, I got the courage to ask for more help from our circle here. Now, we have dinner brought almost every night by a cadre of dear friends. Monday night Audrey Sondijker, our dear friend and neighbor comes; Tuesday, Allied or Finny (another neighbor and Toon Hermans Huis volunteer) bring food prepared by Alex the chef of Toon Hermans house; Wednesday has been dinner and a movie with our dear Maurice Schoffelen for a while now; Thursday, Ursula has plied her skills and Martijn loves her German potato salad; Friday Casey and Jerome will be food angels. Geri and Marcel have been coming with dinner every Sunday.

Ingrid Regout has offered to come on request if she is available, and Martin's brother Janus and sister, Elly, are trying to alternate Tuesdays.

For me, some very old high school friends have appeared via internet bringing strong and comforting connections that only such deep history with one another can provide. Most especially from my good buddy, Deb Cohen-Mersky, whose beloved husband, Marty, died suddenly last year. Many of my beloved friends from Philadelphia High School for Girls, aka, Girls High, have been keeping in touch with me since I had to cancel attending our class 40th reunion last year. Through

Deb's contact and connection a new meaning to our shared history has emerged.

To all my/our angels, near and far, old and new, we extend gratitude that simply doesn't translate well on these pages. But please know and accept that we feel, truly feel, the outpouring of love and support from you. As Martijn continues to say, "I do not feel alone on this journey." We, neither of us, feel alone. This is what is meant by connection. Thank you. Heartfelt thank you.



Metal Tiger, Water Dragon

Wed Jun 11 05:36:00 CDT 2008 |

Metal Tiger, Water Dragon

I am a Metal Tiger* conceived in passion - Consumed by it.

You are the Water Dragon** bathed in patience -

Absolved by it.

I pounce, prance and dance.

You coil, roil and boil.

My expression bursts - Your reflection pools.

My big cat craves approval.

Your mythic reptile shuns it.

How, now, do we blend?

Our courage matches tooth and claw,

Our generosity fills mouth and maw.

Great Dragon fear not that your fire ignites me.

As your flames now subside

I crave, still, your heat inside.

Come, bring me your scales, your great tail,

your fearsome mane,

and rest forever in my softer plane.

My stripes will hide you,

my hide protect you,

my fur soften your journey,

my sharp eye and vast heart

absorb your winged magnificence.

Until myths and legends lapse,

they will know us wherever

east meets west, yin nestles yang,

and they will understand at last

that fate our fortunes cast.

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Pia Brand sings a private concert for Martijn at our home

Concert for Martijn

Fri Jun 20 11:46:00 CDT 2008 |

Diva Pia Brand performs a special father's day concert for Martijn at our home. When Pia learned of our situation she offered two things: to sing a special concert to boost Martin's spirits at our home, and to sing a very special song at his memorial service to hasten his spirit to the other realm. Last Sunday, Father's Day, June 15, 2008, she made good on the first offer. Please join us to see how much Martijn enjoyed his private diva.



Anointing of the Sick: Father Carel Cares for Martijn

Mon Jul 07 02:46:00 CDT 2008 |

At Martin's request, Father Carel van Tulder, our beloved retired Jesuit priest who was referred to us by the cancer support organization, the Toon Herman's Huis, came on Monday, June 16th, the day after Pia's lovely concert for Martijn, to offer the catholic sacrament, Anointing of the Sick. *Here Father Carel prepares the candles. Father Carel offers a welcome and explanation.*



He dons a very special stola made for him from African material.



Father Carel anoints Martijn in our home.

The anointing of the sick is administered to bring spiritual and even physical strength during an illness, especially near the time of death. It is most likely one of the last sacraments one will receive. A sacrament is an outward sign to confer inward grace. In more basic terms, it is a rite that is performed to convey God's grace to the recipient, through the power of the Holy Spirit.



It has been over a week since Martijn has been able to walk down the steps to sit in our living room. It has been a difficult two weeks for me seeing Martijn less mobile and much weaker. Yet, he still is comfortable. He takes only 10mg of OxyContin twice a day, along with an injection of Fraxiprine daily (administered by a home nurse) to combat the effects of thrombosis. Up until yesterday he was able to walk from our bed to the master bathroom to empty his own catheter bag and brush his teeth - but yesterday he asked that I help with these tasks.

Each morning I prepare a healthy breakfast to bring Martijn: a small juice glass of Kanne Bread drink which I'm sure keeps his intestines well functioning; a brimming pot of Earl Grey or English Breakfast tea, fresh brewed; and a fruit smoothie I prepare with soy milk, light yogurt, Barbara's oat cereal, some oatmeal, and fresh fruits, usually seven types. Two mornings a week a home care nurse comes to wash him; the other days I help, including constant changing of the bandage he must wear over the tumor that has aggressively grown

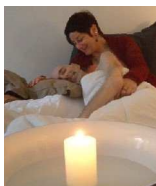
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external in his left groin. This tumor leaks lymph fluid and must be 'dry dressed'; horribly, another is now appearing in his right groin. Along with these newly aggressive growths and the thrombosis, the lymph has been collecting in his legs which is why he is unable to walk. Dr. Bom has allowed that the lymph therapist begin again - a positive event since this lymph massage brings much relief to Martijn, reducing the swelling greatly.

For me this has been a very strange yet moving period. I think I am at a new level of acceptance but this has come with much psychological, emotional and physical work. My therapist Alied has been a rock in helping me process the terrible physical changes I must witness in Martijn. He is literally flesh and bone. But, my 'work' has also allowed me to come to new understanding of our human bodies and souls. Martijn is still my beloved husband and I've come to love and appreciate his body despite its woes. His spirit is so much greater than the poor flesh and bones we tend to think of as 'life'. Today I say this seemingly easily, but the journey to his place, as I have said, has been hard won with much tears and angst.

During this period I took bold personal steps. With the loving assistance of my brother-in-law, Janus, I had a 'free' weekend. He came to care for his brother. The first evening, Friday, June 27th, I took Maurice Schoffelen for a thank you dinner and movie, then I stayed alone at Ursula's apartment while she was away. This was a night that felt like I'd descended to hell. I felt ill, really sick, and so terribly lonely. To get through the night I called Sally Eves in Pennsylvania and as always, she talked me through the worst of it. The following day I spent a wonderful time with Casey O'Dell at the local museum. Casey is like a daughter to me and her empathy and understanding were salve. Later, Claudia Vaz who lives across the hall from us, made a wonderful dinner and Johanna Martinez joined for good conversation and food. Sunday Ursula took me to Thermae 2000, a full spa with multiple pools, whirlpools, saunas and steam rooms. Because Martijn and I so loved being together at Thermae this experience was also bittersweet, but I knew that this weekend off was healing for me as well. And Martijn seemed to bask in the care and attention of his brother and family.

Martijn and I continue to care for each other during this intense journey. I put double meaning on the word, 'care'. In his own powerful way Martijn seeks to protect me from stress and worry. And so we walk together toward this light, this dark light that is our life.



Creativity, consciousness and healing

Sat Jul 12 08:22:00 CDT 2008 |

Enfolded in the arms of your beloved you are never alone.



Susan caresses Martijn on Tuesday, July 7, 2008.

Supported by Sebastian.

We both requested that Sebastian return (please see blog entry June 1st) to share his quiet magic and majesty. He dreamt this ritual for us while sleeping in the next bedroom the previous evening, and Martijn embraced and wholeheartedly invited enacting the concept.



"It is better to light just one little candle than to stumble in the dark."

Transforming the porcelain washbasin to a vessel of light and reflection.

Martijn and I have lived a life of modest creativity. We continue to find strength in the creative radiance of those dear individuals who inhabit our circle of life and love.

Here is a poem written for us by our dear friend, Sally Eves, who lives in the mountains of Pennsylvania with her furry creatures:

Friends

Can you hear us croon to you

in the stillness of the night?

We sing a song in praise of you

to bring you love and light.

Our voices join in melody

with creatures of the night.

The swamp frogs croak

a rhythmic bass

a cacophony our sound; the owl hoot hoots

it unblinking eyes surveying

sky to ground;

the bat's shrill screech is softened by

the swooshing of its wings,

the cadence of the crickets tolls the blessing of all things;

the cat's stealthy silence adds
a pause to all the sounds,
and brings a welcome stillness to the
mystery around;
the fireflies dance in points of light
to the movement of the sound,
and beckon the stars and sultry moon
nearer to the ground.
Do you hear us croon to you
a majestic band of the night?
But nothing to compare to you -
your royalty and light.
- Sally L. Eves
June 30, 2008

Another friend, Maureen Youngstrom, who lived next door to us in Cottagewood, a village in Deephaven, Minnesota where Martijn enjoyed the first five years of our relationship, wrote this to us today, echoing the line in Sally's poem referring to 'swamp frogs':

*Dearest Susan and Martijn,
Like most of your friends and family I have been checking
your blog on a regular basis to see how things are
progressing for the two of you both physically and
emotionally. I am so impressed and inspired by the
wonderful insight and grace that you both bring to this
excruciatingly difficult process. At the same time I am
profoundly sad at the reality of what is happening. I need to
tell you both at the thoughts I had about you on my long and
now regular walks. (I am going to Africa to climb Mt
Kilimanjaro in two weeks so I'm training for that. But more
about that another time). To come right to point I think of
you and Martijn almost constantly when I am out walking.
In the beginning I thought it was just because my walks
were starting out going by your old house and because I
think a big part of Martin's identity for me is that of the
'thoughtful Cottagewood walker'. Now I've come to realize
there's more to it than that. I almost always end my walk
with a stop at Hidden Beach where I am usually alone. It is
here that I feel a kinship with the part of both your spirits
that are still here. Also, I have been receiving another sign of
your spirits. I have to preface this part of the story by
relaying the fact that, until recently, I had seen maybe three
or four frogs in the ten years I've lived here. This being said I
have seen a frog on an almost daily basis for the last couple*

of weeks. Usually this sighting takes place on the last leg of my walk between hidden beach and home. Yesterday, it was a pair who instead of bolting into the bushes, hoped ahead of me for several yards before they took their own path. In a way I can't really articulate this gave me an incredibly peaceful and content feeling. I only hope in the extreme intensity of your lives right now that you find moments, however fleeting, of profound peace. This is my prayer for you both each day. My thoughts and prayers are with you through your journey
Love - Maureen

Just so you know Martijn cannot use the computer anymore but I do print emails and share all of your comments with him for which is so grateful and filled with love. We are so supported and only wish that we could do the same back for each and every one of you. But, in fact, we do, each night when we say our prayers and hold you in our collective heart.

Dear friends comfort us both

Tue Jul 22 03:10:00 CDT 2008 |



Rich Heck helps Martijn to eat on his birthday, Sunday, July 20th

Martijn and I spent many wonderful times with Suzanne and Rich enjoying the view from their living room to the pond beyond. Now the Martijn Tree will be in full view.

It is now the final days of Martin's life. He remains vivid at times, but mostly he sleeps. He can no longer turn himself nor eat nor hold a glass of water on his own. On Sunday his mother, Geri, and our Marcel came along with brother Janus and my sister-in-law, Irma, and brother Noel to celebrate Martin's 56th birthday. It is a milestone he vowed to make back in March when we received the news that the cancer had spread and was terminal.

I drift in and out of denial and acceptance that my beloved 'frog' will no longer be with me on this fragile plane of existence. Helping me through this period, which has proved to be the most difficult for me, are Suzanne and Rich.

Suzanne told me months ago to simply let her know when I needed them and they would come. I did. They came on

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Suzanne tells Martijn about the Weeping Cherry Tree they planted in his honor in their lovely backyard overlooking the pond

Thursday the 17th. Along with my brother-in-law, Janus, they are helping us walk this strange, mysterious, frightening path to that place where each and every one of us must go, but yet remains veiled like the fabled mists of Avalon in so much secrecy and awe.

I am not telling you the half of the story here. We have so many brave souls to thank for providing care and support. That will come. Please read this wise saying sent to Martijn by our friend Jacqueline Braun to understand how I feel:

Friendship is the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words.

- George Eliot (a female 19th century British novelist)



Martijn Anna Antonius Hermse

Trying on His Wings

Fri Jul 25 06:30:00 CDT 2008 |

Martijn Anna Antonius Hermse
July 21, 1952 - July 25, 2008

Martijn passed peacefully at 1:45 AM in our home surrounded by his family and friends. He did indeed die with a smile on his face having spent a day greeting select family, friends and care providers, particularly our beloved Dr. Maurice Bom whose professionalism and personal warmth guaranteed Martijn a safe passage.

The funeral will be held on Wednesday, July 30th, at the St. Janskerk in the Vrijthof Square here in Maastricht. A coffee table will offered afterwards at the Fort St. Pieter. We invite those of you can to come to the memorial service that Martijn and I together carefully planned. It will be beautiful and befitting his life. All are welcome.

As you can guess I exist now in a suspended state after such an intense period

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of focusing almost solely on the care of my beloved. Witnessing his death in our own bedroom, surrounded by light and love does make his passing more recognizable but not more welcome. Yes, for him I am so relieved - his pain that was great at the very end is over. But mine in finding a way, a world apart from him now begins. And so it is.

Here is the **text I have written for Martin's service** in English and translated into Dutch by his brother, Janus, who has been my rock and support:

MARTIJN HERMSE: A LIFE OF LEARNING AND LOVE

For my beloved husband, Martijn, a true gentleman and scholar, and my best friend

Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than learning. His conduct, therefore, often produces the impression that we properly learn nothing from him, if by "learning" we now suddenly understand merely the procurement of useful information.

- Martin Heidegger

On our wedding day, almost 13 years ago, Martijn was called a "real wise guy" by a friend who intended fully the double meaning – signifying both his status as a joker or a trickster, and its ancillary meaning – a truly wise man. My beloved husband was both. He often made others comfortable by making funny jokes, catching his 'audience' off guard. I believe he surfaced this version of "the wise guy" because he was, in truth, a bit more intellectual than many of his listeners. So, he gently diffused many situations for them by 'making light' of a deep subject.

It took me a long time to appreciate this aspect of Martijn. I so admired and respected his mind that I often grew irritated when he played his verbal tricks. I wanted his intellect to shine, but his modesty prevailed. Thankfully, I grew to understand that this was yet one more aspect of his truly unique and engaging character. Thankfully, also, during our years in Maastricht, I was granted the time to be with Martijn when he was engaged with his family, whom he loved truly, madly deeply, to witness, learn, and come to appreciate his form of gentle wisdom - his "real teacher" self, as Heidegger states.

For myself and many others, Martijn will remain the ultimate teacher - by modest example. He needed no classroom, no lecture hall and no dissertation to shine his incredible intellect on any subject - from economy to environment to gastronomy to human rights to animal rights. He stands apart as a great intellect who required no fame or fortune for his wisdom. Rather, Martijn solidly inhabited a rare universe where his own armchair sufficed, and his many acolytes came naturally, drawn by his warmth and authenticity. Martijn was constant in a world of ever changing attitudes. He held his beliefs as tightly and mightily as he held those lucky enough to find themselves in his

vast, loving nature. I am blessed to have been held tightly in his strong and constant arms almost everyday for 13 years. Although this temporal time was far too short, we have promised to each other that a love like ours can and shall shine through space and time to bond our souls for eternity. Those of you who have also been touched by Martijn can hold him – his humor, warmth and wisdom – eternally, and continue ‘to let learn’.

- Forever yours, Susan

Dutch version:

Onderwijzen is moeilijker dan leren want wat onderwijzen vereist is dit: laten leren. De ware docent zorgt in feite dat er niets anders geleerd wordt dan te leren. Daardoor komt het dat hij door zijn gedrag vaak de indruk wekt dat we juist niets van hem leren, tenminste als wij nu plots onder “leren” verstaan: het louter verwerven van nuttige informatie.

- Martin Heidegger

Op onze huwelijksdag, bijna 13 jaar geleden, werd Martijn door een van zijn vrienden een “echt wijze man” genoemd, hiermee bewust doelend op de dubbele betekenis van zowel Martijns reputatie van grappenmaker en mensen voor de gek houden, als de gewone betekenis van een werkelijk wijze man. Mijn echtgenoot was beide. Hij stelde anderen vaak op hun gemak door grappige dingen te zeggen, waarmee hij zijn “toehoorders” in bescherming nam. Ik ben ervan overtuigd dat hij deze versie van “wijze man” koesterde omdat hij in werkelijkheid intellectueler was dan velen van zijn luisteraars. Op deze manier redde hij menig situatie door een zwaar onderwerp “lichter te maken”.

Ik had enige tijd nodig om dit aspect van Martijn te leren waarderen. Ik bewonderde en respecteerde zozeer zijn intelligentie dat ik mij vaak ergerde als hij weer met zijn woord-spelletjes bezig was. Ik wilde dat zijn intellect laten schijnen, maar zijn bescheidenheid voerde de boventoon. Gelukkig leerde ik mettertijd begrijpen dat dit juist weer een ander aspect van zijn uniek en innemend karakter was. Ook ben ik dankbaar dat ik, gedurende onze jaren in Maastricht, de tijd gekregen heb samen met Martijn te zijn als hij bij zijn familie was, van wie hij intens en oprecht veel hield, om getuige te zijn en te leren van zijn milde wijsheid, van zijn eigen “ware docent zijn”, zoals Heidegger zegt.

Zowel voor mijzelf als voor vele anderen zal Martijn de ultieme docent blijven - als een bescheiden voorbeeld. Hij had geen klaslokaal nodig, geen collegezaal en geen proefschrift om zijn ongelooflijk intellect uit te stralen over alle mogelijke onderwerpen - van economie tot milieuzaken, van gastronomie tot mensenrechten, of zelfs tot dierenrechten. Hij is uniek vanwege zijn grote intellect dat roem noch fortuin verlangde voor zijn wijsheid. Nee, Martijn woonde eerder in een zeldzame wereld waarin hij genoeg had aan zijn fauteuil en waar zijn vele acolieten als vanzelf kwamen, aangetrokken door zijn warmte en eigenheid. Martijn was een constante factor in een wereld van steeds

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veranderende opvattingen. Hij hield even onverschrokken vast aan zijn overtuigingen als hij vasthield aan degenen die het geluk hadden van zijn liefdevolle aard te mogen genieten. Ik voel me bevoorrecht dat ik gedurende bijna 13 jaar dagelijks door zijn sterke, stevige armen omarmd ben geweest. Ondanks dat deze vergankelijke tijd te kort heeft geduurd, hebben wij elkaar beloofd dat een liefde als de onze kan en moet stralen door ruimte en tijd om onze zielen te verbinden bin voor de eeuwigheid.

Wie van de aanwezigen hier door Martijn zijn geraakt, kunnen - zijn humor, warmte en wijsheid - voor eeuwig bewaren, en verdergaan met “laten leren”.
- Voor altijd de jouwe, Susan

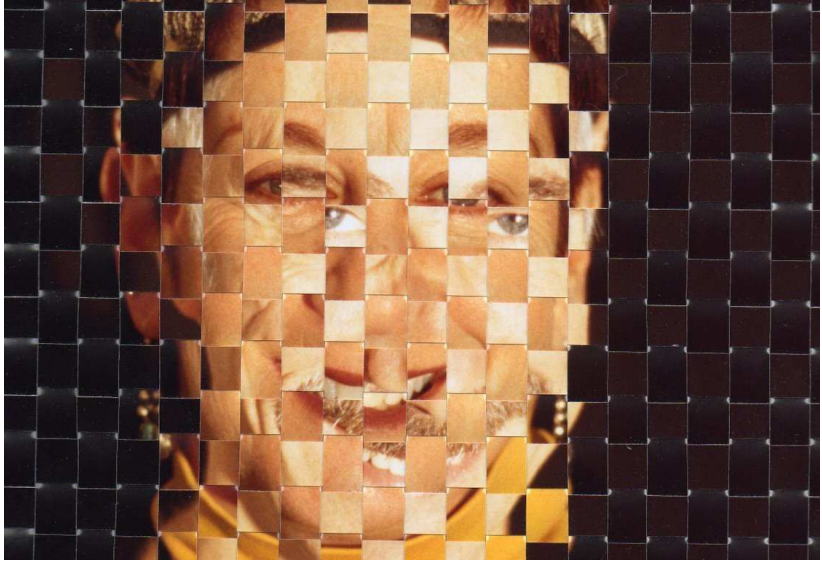


Photo weaving - "Martijn in Susan, Susan in Martijn"

D. Sipple

When the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance

Fri Aug 08 06:16:00 CDT 2008 |

I deeply miss my soulmate. I feel the loss in my bones; yet there must be a purpose for me ... alone, or anyway, without my better half. Right now it doesn't feel that way. It feels cruel and terribly unfair. But I have faith, and after all, isn't that all there is once all the illusions of life are broken upon the reality of death?

Michal Baranowski, one of my University of Maastricht classmates attended the service and wrote:

Dear Susan,

It was really good to see you again. I wish that the occasion was just a simple visit, and that Martijn could be there, but in some way I think we were able to say hello to Martijn on that day. I wanted to thank you for inviting us, I'm really glad we could come. I wanted to thank you for the service, it was the most beautiful, moving good bye I have ever witnessed. But most importantly

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it was a great celebration of Martin's life. Through his friends and family, I feel I have met him closer than possibly anytime before.

From "The Prophet":

Then Almitra spoke, saying, We would ask now of Death

And he said:

You would know the secret of death. But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life? The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day cannot unveil the mystery of light. If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life. For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one. In the depth of your hopes and desires lies your silent knowledge of the beyond; And like seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams of spring. Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity. Your fear of death is but the trembling of the shepherd when he stands before the king whose hand is to be laid upon him in honor.

Is the sheered not joyful beneath his trembling, that he shall wear the mark of the king? Yet is he not more mindful of his trembling?

For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun?

And what is to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?

Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing.

And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb.

And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance.

Separately a day later came this email from our dear friend *John Gjerde*:

Susan,

I was gone and just got your email. I am deeply saddened by the passing of Martijn. The realization feels like such a jolt that it affects every feeling in my body. Martijn is a very special person and I would always feel relaxed around him. My conversations with him were like no other - very deep with meaning. I was feeling good today and I will fight through the sadness to see the sun still shining. I will take the dogs some place where I can feel the wind and sun and view the trees. I know I will see Martijn there somewhere and when I do, I will promise to smile. I will call. You have been wonderful. You and Martijn have a special relationship. When you mention our walks, they seem so simply. Now they seem so special. I would like to do them again and again. My love for you and Martijn can be measured by the sadness I feel. I have now shed a few tears and I would like nothing more than to give you a big hug. My heart goes out to you and family.

With all of my love,

John Gj.

And so Martijn melts into the sun. His breath is now the wind. I shall hope once more to truly dance with Martijn inside me for my remaining days. My friends and family fill my soul with hope.



Martijn gazes from the gate of Palageto, over the hills of Fiesole to Florence, Italy below, summer 2005.

Martin's Memorials in Minnesota and Pennsylvania

Sun Aug 10 06:12:00 CDT 2008 |

This was a time of great happiness for us.

One journey ends another begins. More than two weeks have passed since I last held my beloved. This is the longest period of time I've ever spent separated since we joined as a couple. The loss is keen and deep. I will try to move forward since that is what Martijn wanted. He saw me with a new beginning; I could never share in this vision with him though I tried to smile and I made promises of things I would do in his honor. Now I shall numbly begin to fulfill those.

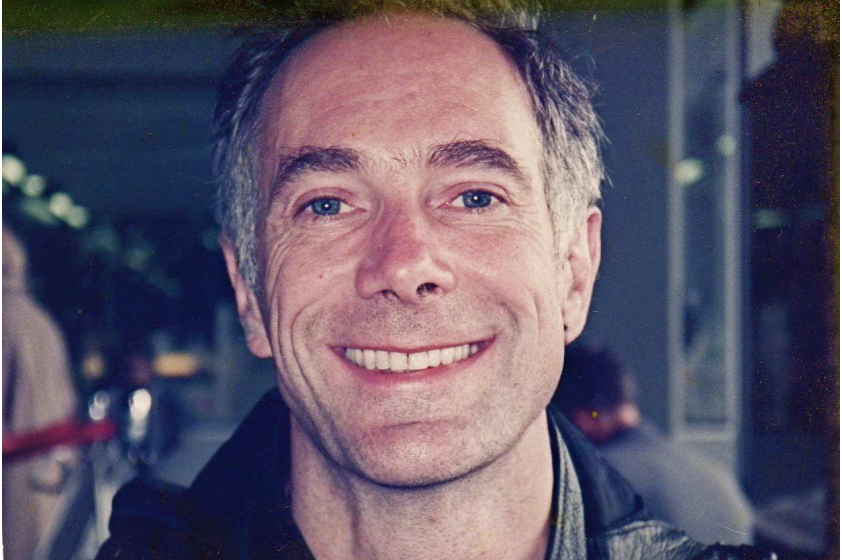
Here at home in Maastricht, it seems as if Martin's spirit worked quickly to send me an angel so that I would not be alone - physically. A dear friend, Johanna, will stay with me for an extended time. Since the funeral, in fact, she has not left my side. Her presence is like a light in the darkness - she is at once lively and lovely as well as comforting and empathetic. We both were in need of

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someone to share a life transition with, and so she is here and will remain. On Monday, August 11th, I journey to Minnesota, joining friends who have been a circle of love and support for almost 20 years. I will stay with David and Michael and Suzanne and Rich, seeing and visiting with as many friends as is possible. I hopefully will get to embrace the furry Miss Snoepje and her adopted mother, Stephanie, as I know Martijn would want. He was buried holding in his hands Snoepje's raggedy 'misela', her stuffed mouse which Martijn treasured as much as any of his possessions. A recent photo of her and another treasured stuffed toy also were lovingly placed in his coffin, as I know he would have loved.

A Memorial Service under the full moon will be held in Cottagewood on Lake Minnetonka's Sandy Beach on Saturday, August 16th at sunset. All are welcome to attend and invited to bring a candle to light. We will gather at the home of our dear friends, the Youngstroms, at 8PM - 4230 Mt. Curve, Deephaven, MN.

Then I journey to Pennsylvania to spend time with many lifelong friends, first journeying to the Pocono Mountains with my dear ex-husband, Bob Ingram, to be with my soulmate, Sally Eves. From there I will stay at the New Jersey shore with Bob until after Labor Day when I will go to my dear friend, Barbara Craig, in Center City Philly. Martijn and I always adored staying at Barbara's home. In Philly we will hold a memorial service on Saturday, September 6th at 7:30PM at galleries of our dear friends Ruth & Rick Snyderman, 303 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA. Again, all are welcome to attend. Although Martijn was so modest, he would like that others could celebrate his life, and I know, support me as I walk this road without his constant and loyal presence and protection.



Schiphol Airport 1995

Martin's Letter to His American Friends

Mon Sep 08 08:44:00 CDT 2008 |
Maastricht, Wednesday, 30th of April 2008
To my dear American Friends,

I can tell my deepest emotions in a few words: I really have become to appreciate you and your country. I met a lot of openness, had fun with you, and understand much better how your society evolved from the very beginnings. In these difficult political and economic times for you I want to say that there is quite a difference between a government and the American people. I have got to know you as so much more spontaneous, energetic and even more friendly than my own countrymen. Of course I had and have some serious criticism on how the system works, but I know a lot of you do too. But let me tell you this: almost every American visitor to us in Maastricht got by me the invitation to visit the American cemetery in Margraten (near to Maastricht) and Henri-Chapelle in nearby Belgium, where

so many American soldiers died for the cause of real freedom in this continent. Maybe it because I belong to an older generation already, but I have always been aware of the terrible price your country paid on behalf of us. By the way, Maastricht was the first Dutch city to be liberated. I always felt at ease near to the dead in their graves: it is the mix of the consciousness of history, stillness, and the beautiful landscape that gives the feeling that we sense the bigger and sometimes incomprehensible whole around us. I got this same feeling many times when I was very near to nature when living with Suzy in Minnesota: the Indian Summer, the sail boats on the ice of Lake Minnetonka, or sauna near frozen Prior Lake. Thank you for sharing in the beauty of your people and nature!



Our Parisian Honeymoon, July 1996

Our "Usness"

Sat Sep 13 16:42:00 CDT 2008 |

We spoke openly of how our love might endure once Martijn was not present in the physical realm. These conversations were difficult, most difficult and touching and wrenching. Martijn found it easier to tell me of his beliefs in the love beyond space and time by quoting from respected authors. Now, as I endure pain sometimes so dark and bleak that I'd rather depart this earth, I try, really try to allow Martin's love to in fact be transformative, transcendent. When I let myself, I feel this radiance and let it fill me with hope. It will take all my strength to overcome the loss of the physical tenderness, gentleness, happiness and even rapture that Martin's mere physical presence provided.

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Our "Usness" was integral to our love - it existed not only in romantic embraces, but in the sheer affection and attentiveness we lavished on the other. What, I ask, what can replace this tenderness? How does my soul accept this ethereal, spiritual evolution when as a beating, breathing heart I so crave the warmth of my beloved?

I will take faith from Martin's beliefs. Here are the two most touching pieces he presented me. The first is taken from a precious handwritten card for my 58th birthday:

Friday, the 4th of april 2008,

To my most beloved wife,

I feel very, very sad to write this down, and I don't know what words to choose. I borrow the words from Elisabeth Barrett-Browning, Sonnet XLI, from the Portuguese:

*"Oh to shoot my soul's full meaning in to future years,
That they should lend it utterance and salute
Love that endures with Life that disappears!"*

From your husband Martijn

This final note was left for me to find, marked in a book by the **philosopher Binswanger** that he was intending to use for his work on a thesis about love beyond time and space.

From Ludwig Binswanger, the German philosopher,
Grundformen und Erkenntnis menschlichen Daseins. Zurich

*But how are things when death does not meet You but Me?
Even then, as your You, I am not dying;
even then the Usness in love does not decay.
I can only die as an individual, but not as the You of an I.
When I die as an individual, then yet in dying,
I am more than ever Yours, part of our Usness.
As I received "my life" from your hands anew –
from yours as the hands of the lover
as much as only through you,
the being in Usness "opened up" for me –
I put it back into your hands when dying.
I do not die the "heavy" death of an isolated "I",
but say goodbye to you knowing that even in this parting is still
presence because the lover as someone who was here is still here in the sense
of the existence of the Usness,
a Here that rips open the depths and abysses of existence even more;
that calls it even more into the eternal presence of love and allows it to exist
within that love.*



Martijn and Susan enjoy a joyous New Year's Eve (with Suzanne and Rich) in Excelsior, Minnesota, ten years ago, 1988.

Merci sends wisdom from Rilke

Thu Sep 25 01:49:00 CDT 2008 |

Dear Susan,

I'm sending along a passage which I read in the last few days, and found very comforting. I like Rilke's poetry a lot, but the book someone gave me is a collection of his correspondence. For the sake of context, I've included the entire passage, though some parts may speak more to you than others (as they did for me). I also took the liberty of adding paragraph breaks...so sue me for my editorial touch! The bolded/italic words were stressed in the original.

Thinking of you, and sending you a warm hug!

Lots of love,

Merci

My dear S...,

I very much took your letter to heart, and, on the one hand, I wish to encourage you in your pain so that you experience it in all of its fullness, since as the experience of a new intensity it is a great experience of life and in turn

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leads back toward life, like everything that reaches a certain extreme degree of strength. On the other hand, I am filled with fear when I imagine how you have cut off and limited your life at this point, afraid of touching anything full of memories (and what is not full of memories?). You will freeze up if you keep doing that, you must not, dear, you have to keep moving, you have to return to the things that had been his, you have to lay hand on [your lost one's] things that are also yours due to such complex relations and attractions, S... (this might be the mission assigned to you by this incomprehensible fate).

You have to continue his life within your life to the extent that it had not been completed; his life has now passed over to yours and you who truly knew him can move forward quite as intended: make this the task of your mourning, to explore what he expected of you, hoped for you, wished would happen to you. If I could only convince you, my friend, that his influence has not left your existence (how much more securely I feel my father's influence and assistance within me since he is no longer with us).

Consider how much in daily life distracts, obscures, and renders another's love imprecise. Now especially he is here, and now he has all the freedom to be here and we have all the freedom to feel him... Haven't you felt [your lost one's] influence and affinity this way thousands of times from outer space where nothing, nothing, S..., can ever be lost? Do not believe that anything that is part of our true realities could disappear or cease to exist: that which had so steadily worked its effects on us had already been a reality independent of all our present and familiar circumstances. This is precisely why we experienced it in such a different way and as responding to a completely independent need, because from the beginning it was aimed and determined at something beyond the here and now.

All of our true relations, all of our penetrating experiences reach through the Whole, through life and death; we have to live in Both, be intimately at home in both. I know people who are already facing both the one and the other quite intimately and with the same love. And is life truly less mysterious and more familiar to us than that other condition? Are they not both placed namelessly above us, and equally out of reach. We are true and pure only in our willingness toward the whole, the undecided, the great, and the greatest."

- Rainer Marie Rilke

From a letter written August 1, 1913, to Sidonie Nádherny von Borutin, from the book: "The Poet's Guide to Life: The Wisdom of Rilke," edited and translated by Ulrich Baer.



Photo by ©Rob Kulisek for The SUN newspaper

"We only part to meet again." - John Gay

Mon Oct 06 09:27:00 CDT 2008 |

Dearest Friends - I take a step toward wholeness and healing each day. My terror and fear have subsided - replaced by a quiet knowing that Martijn indeed is within me, and also nearby many of you. There have been 'reports' of frogs appearing where none have been, of blackbird sightings, and of a general feeling that his spirit has truly taken wing. So many of you have reached out to me in so many ways. As I heal, as I journey forward to my (re)new(ed) destiny, I offer you my gratitude, which seems like so little in the face of what I (and Martijn) have received from you.

I'll continue to share those blessings, offerings, wishes, that others provide to give me hope and faith. Below is a story, written by my dear ex-husband, Bob Ingram, for "the Sun by-the-sea" newspaper, published by the lovely and dynamic Dorothy Kulisek, in Wildwood-by-the-Sea, New Jersey, where Bob lives.

Bob took such great care of me during my recent journey back to the East Coast and my home town of Philadelphia. As a surprise, he wrote the following story for the Sun, taking on the persona of 'my brother' in this tale of hope and faith. I hope you are as touched by this story as I am. Please feel free to comment at the bottom of the page of the blog. Blessings for this Jewish New Year - we typically say may your year be as sweet as apple dipped in honey.

Autumn Evening

By Bob Ingram

She came straight from the airport and arrived at his Wildwood cottage in the early evening of a warm, glorious Indian summer day.

"You must be all jet-lagged," he said. "How long was the flight from Amsterdam?"

"Almost eight hours," she said, "Can we go to the beach or something? I want to get out. I still feel all closed in. It's been so long since I've been down here, too."

"Let me take you to my favorite evening spot. It's really beautiful. And you get the late sun, you know?"

"Good. I could use it. It doesn't get really hot over there much. I missed the heat here."

"How long was it?" he asked. "How long were you there? I lost track."

"Almost six years. God, it seemed like we'd just got settled when it all happened. Where does the time go? It was so nice and then that."

"I know," he answered. "I'm sorry I couldn't come. I really wanted to."

"I know. But you had your life. And you were there before. Don't worry. You've been a good brother. Now we're all we have left for each other."

"Yeah. We're orphans together," he said. They laughed, softly. "Come on. You'll love this spot."

In the parking lot, she said, "That's the lighthouse, right?"

"Yep. Hereford Inlet Lighthouse. It goes back to the 1870s, I think. But it's the gardens that I want you to see. They're like old English country gardens, sort of all over the place, but when you see them altogether, they're actually breathtaking. I know the guy who does them. He's really an artist. Sometimes when I'm here by myself and it's quiet and I'm listening to Bach or somebody on my Walkman, I think he's a genius. This has to be the most wonderful place on the island. Exquisite, you know? Like sort of a hidden treasure."

They were alone there, and the gardens were brilliant in the late sun. Monarch butterflies fluttered through on their fall migration north, and the birds had begun their soft evening songs, adding somehow to the quiet, which was palpable, an actual presence. The world was at one with itself, as if time had

slowed to the measure of the light breeze that barely rustled the slowly nodding flowers.

They walked idly, letting their feet take them, and all about them was the silent rapture that the garden could become, each step a further revelation in color and shape and natural design, abetted invisibly by the hand that had guided it. He let the garden's inner delight again descend on him, while she was newly enraptured, softly struck, awed. She named aloud some of the flowers: holyhocks, day lilies, nicotiana, nasturtium, snapdragons, foxgloves.

He was impressed. "Wow, you know all these."

"Not all. It's amazing, really. Do you come here a lot?"

"I do. It's such a good way to end the day."

They made their way around the lighthouse and he led her through the small spice garden, and then through the arbor of low trees and shrubs that formed a green tunnel along the board path that led out of the gardens to the sea wall that runs along the inlet.

"I usually sit here for a while," he said.

They sat on a bench. In front of them was a small lake formed by the tides and beyond that Hereford Inlet stretched past Champagne Island to Stone Harbor in the distance. The ocean was off Stone Harbor, endless. Seabirds sailed to and fro, gulls calling shrilly into the evening air as they made ready for the night. The slight breeze was cooler now.

In front of them was a stone marker with the inscription: "In memory of all those lost at sea."

"Maybe it would have been better if he'd just been lost that way," she said.

"It must have been so hard," he said. "Knowing how it would end."

"Yes and no. We were able to plan it all: the plot, the coffin, the service. He was involved in everything. I think it gave him some comfort."

He looked away, then back at her. "You both showed so much courage," he said.

"Not me, really. He was more than brave. He was almost holy toward the end. He was so much my husband then. We were so close. We shared the last of his life together. It was kind of amazing, now that I think of it. We were almost one those last few weeks. But now, now I worry that I could have done more, made it easier for him. I keep thinking about it."

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“Don’t,” he said. “You did all that could be done. I know you. Don’t even think that.”

“I guess so. But I do, you know.”

“Yes. That’s you, too.”

They sat in silence then, the sea sound a constant echo of itself punctuated by bird cries. The first russet streaks of sunset showed against the blue of the sea and sky.

Presently, she turned to him and said, “Would you mind if I sat here by myself for a while?”

“Of course not,” he answered. “I’ll walk in the gardens.”

When he came back, he paused in front of her before sitting down. Then he said, “You look different somehow. What’s the word? Transcendent. That’s it.” She smiled at him, and indeed she did look different, as if a weight had somehow been removed.

“Let me tell you what just happened,” she said. “It was amazing. I’m still not sure it happened. I was just sitting here. I was crying a little bit, you know? After a while, this young couple came along with their little daughter. She couldn’t have been more than three years old. Blond. Beautiful, actually. She was wearing a white sundress and she looked to me like a little blond angel.

“The parents said hello and kept on walking, but the little girl stopped and looked at me. Then she said, ‘Why are you crying?’ Her voice was so clear, like a little bell. I said I was sad and she nodded her head like she understood. Then she came over and put her hands on my knees and looked me right in the face. ‘He’s all right now. Don’t worry,’ she said. Then she skipped away; she actually skipped after her parents.

“And my heart kind of skipped then, too, and then I understood deep inside of me, and now I feel so different, so much better.”

“I know,” he said. “Like I said, it shows.”

“And I still don’t know if was real or not,” she said. “But if you look way down there, you can still see them. You can see her little white dress.” She pointed.

He looked and he could see a small white dot, bobbing along the sea wall. Then it disappeared.

- The End -



Brother's Love

Sun Oct 12 15:50:00 CDT 2008 |

Martijn & Jan, Minneapolis, 1999

In the days leading up to, during and immediately after Martin's death, my brother-in-law, Janus Hermse, has been a godsend to me. Martijn asked Jan to 'take care of me' as he asked me 'to take care of Jan'. Janus has been a rock and I'm grateful not only to him, but to my sister-in-law, Irma for sharing him with me during these trying times. Jan's love for Martijn was passionately matched by Martin's for him. At the funeral service in Maastricht Janus bravely delivered the keynote memorial, describing in loving yet direct detail his perspective of his beloved brother Martijn. My dear friend, David Fey, graciously read this at the moonlit memorial in Minnesota, now two months ago, and my wonderful ex-husband, Bob Ingram, did so at the service in Philadelphia. I share this speech with you so that you can better know Martijn from Jan's intimate and loving point of view:

Memorial speech by Janus Hermse for the funeral ceremony of his brother Martijn Hermse - Maastricht, July 30th, 2008.

My brother was a Minsch. This Limburgian word is clearly related to the

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German-Yiddish Mensch and difficult to translate. In short, it characterizes a human being that is present, visible as a complete person and expressing this in his way of life. No hero, no idol, no superman but a human being who is standing in his strengths and weaknesses; a human being living his humanness in all its facets. And Martijn did live. Sometimes without any compromise and hard yet more and more often in a gentle, understanding and compassionate way.

Martijn had, particularly in the past, a clear vision on society and was quite opinionated about how people should live. He also translated this to his own life and tried to live according to his principles. Yet, he would also impose his vision on his parents, his brothers and sister, telling them what they should do according to him. His heavy involvement with his environment and family led to quite some confrontations or fights that sometimes ended in periods of hardly a word spoken. His affection for his beloved ones then got lost behind hard "truths".

When I was between 10 and 14 years old, I saw Martijn as an almost frightening older brother, with a coercive presence in our house when he came home from his studies in the weekends. His room was his sanctuary where nothing could be changed even if he would only come once every six weeks. He determined what we ate and which programmes we watched on TV. The rules of the house were partly made by him. The reasons for this are not fully clear to me. Maybe he wanted to make the world a better place and struggled with his very rational approach to reality and the powerlessness that he felt in this endeavor.

Martijn was involved in everything and did not circumvent anything on his search for the truth. Over the years, probably due to his growing experience and wisdom, he opened himself to a more loving approach. He had more attention for others and could appreciate them more in their uniqueness. This is also how Susan came into his life and how we got to see more of the other side of Martijn: a gentle, caring and emotionally committed man.

When I was about 16 years old, I got closer with Martijn. We shared a passion for culture and visited concerts, plays and movies together. We had hour-long conversations while enjoying one of the special liqueurs that he had discovered. Through Martijn I got to know Mahler, Wagner and Artimotov, the beauty and consolation of art and the big city of Amsterdam. Partly, I became an artist thanks to Martijn; he introduced me to a world that before had been unknown to me. I understood that Martijn had found a new environment in which he could develop himself further. In Amsterdam and Nijmegen, he built a big circle of friends with whom he is still connected.

In Amsterdam, I got to know him as a gallant host who wanted to please his guests and would entertain them with all kinds of things to know and see. He shared his universe with my father, mother, Marcel and me. He displayed the same hospitality with others. You were always welcome to stay and eat at his place. He entertained his guests with funny stories, humor and sometimes bizarre jokes; A humor that we shared and that became part of our family. Martijn was also famous for his economical way of living, not in his dealings with people but in daily matters. He would buy bread that was a day old to get a discount. He used teabags twice or three times. He enjoyed it when

something was for free. This way he was able to create a quality lifestyle without much money. Particularly, because at the same time he could live like a dandy. If he considered it worthwhile, he would spend money on luxuries goods, such as exclusive liqueurs, perfumes or ingredients for meals.

When he met Susan and moved to the States, these personal characteristics developed further. There, he stole the hearts and minds of many people. This was not only his merit as I also got to know his American friends as open, warm and committed people who created space for uniqueness, originality and love. This is the soil where Martin could grow and develop himself into a complete person.

Martijn was a romantic. We shared the same preferences for movies, literature, music, poems, arts and politics that were emotionally charged, displayed sharp contrasts, had dark sometimes melancholic undertones, expressed the non-obvious, the unspeakable and irrational, the longing for a better world in the search for the overwhelming ardor of existence. Where the world extended beyond the directly visible and nothing was as it appeared. Where we were part of the universe, connected in the big and small. Ratio versus Pathos, Apollo versus Dionysus, light versus darkness. A swirling and moving universe in which nothing is fixed. Contradictions that were unified in Martijn. He did not want to lead an easy life and kept on searching for the truth. This made him a Minsch.

Another aspect of his romantic nature showed in his travels. Martijn started early on to read books about foreign countries, he knew a lot about geography, knew the train schedules by heart and dreamt about all kinds of special journeys. And he did not only dream. Every year he traveled for longer or shorter periods to foreign countries and cities: Morocco, Greece, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Mexico, and, of course, the US. These journeys were a means to enlarge his cultural but also his human universe. At almost every journey he made new friends. Particularly with Germany and the former Eastern block he developed a special relationship, not surprisingly, as there lies the soil of the romantic spirit. Through his travels and his living in the US, he redeveloped a strong bond with nature. The spaciousness, openness, quietness, and diversity of the landscape spoke to him.

Concern for the body and health were part of this nature. He paid much attention to his own body, his health and the health of others. Mind and body had to be in balance.

Also in love matters he was a romantic. He loved deeply and unconditionally. There was no compromise, when you love you give yourself fully and stay faithful. He did not go for less. He could be demanding but also generously giving. He got disappointed heavily a couple of times. He had to go a long way to finally find the peace and safety in a love that fitted him.

He gave up his life in the Netherlands to build a new existence with Susan in the US. He did this full of love and conviction. Susan and Martijn developed a great love and connection with each other where they both could grow as persons. Martijn found his great love.

At the same time, he stayed faithful to his family and old friends with whom he maintained intense contact.

Martijn had a strong bond with his family. We are not a standard family, were

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dispersed during our youth and developed separately mainly due to our age differences. Nevertheless, there was a strong connection based on commitment, solidarity and a shared history with love for each other. His relationship with his father was complicated but developed from confrontation to understanding, acceptance and a shared love for music. Each month, Martijn went with his father to the Vara-matinee in Amsterdam to listen to concerts. Martijn had a special connection to his mother. Closely related and open, they could share a lot with each other. Together with Marcel they traveled a lot and Marcel became a sort of brother for Martijn.

Even if the relationship with our brother and Noel and sister Elly was problematic when old demons reappeared, the sharp borders softened and Martijn was able to see his brother and sister more and more. Martijn also became more of an uncle interested in his nieces and nephews. There clearly was more space for the other which enabled him to share more of his love.

In his love, Martijn developed into a complete person, able to give and more and more also able to share and receive. He was able to see the other more fully and could give more space. Confrontation became less important. He learned to love himself more and more and through this the other.

If I look at the life of my brother Martijn, I see a person who really lived. He had to walk many different paths. A person who made many journeys and detours, he got to know beautiful experiences, great love and friendships but also pain, fear and alienation. He could be a wonderfully warm person and at times he was hurtful and hard. He loved life and enjoyed it in all its facets. At the same time he was against soulless consumerism. He was the searcher who would not easily run away with an idea, but was searching for the truth, the unique, the original, that what matters in life. He did not forget his fellow men, was politically aware and felt solidarity with the lower class of society, those who have nothing.

Martijn was a case full of contradictions. In the last years, these contradictions got unified more and more and lived next to each other in harmony in the person of Martijn.

This all is why my brother Martijn was a Minsch. I am proud of him and will miss him.



*Elegant for our annual New Year's Eve celebration,
December 2000*

Grieving is a journey not an event

Tue Oct 21 07:34:00 CDT 2008 |

I savor memories. It is my right. Today is Martin's 56th and a quarter birthday. It is now almost three months since I last held him in my arms. Three months since his smile lit me into hopefulness even as he lay dying. What is three months? I can tell you time during grief becomes meaningless. Days turn to nighttime and night to day leaving little but a tick on some calendar. I remember vividly the seconds even leading up to Martin's death; I can draw mentally his expressions, his hidden pain, his constant optimism even on the day of his death. I can feel his bony shoulders still warm under my fingers, and taste his lips, still sweet even as his body became consumed by the relentless tumors. I ache for this man this heart of my heart. My intellect perceives that he is gone but like a severed limb my soul FEELS his presence, yearns for the

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reality of his touch, his voice, his laughter, his LIGHT. My world is surreal and somehow darker. There are glimpses of light, mind you. I often feel Martin's spirit working to lift mine. I hear his voice reminding me to take care, to eat right, to take my vitamins, to exercise, to sleep. Sometimes I do.

Martin's funeral in Maastricht was perfect - he would have loved it. The day was lovely, sunny, not too warm or too cold. The St. Jan's Kerk on the major square of Maastricht was packed full. Herman Rouw and Pia Brand performed live music worthy of a band of angels. There were over 200 people in attendance and this was during the height of Europe's summer holidays. There would have been standing room only if not for this fact. Father Mattie was perfect in his role of spiritual facilitator - a Franciscan monk speaking Hebrew and allowing for the eclecticism of the service that featured Jewish, native American, zen and Catholic traditions. There were elegant testimonials, many of which have been reprinted here in this blog in previous entries, from Martijn and my oldest and dearest friends, as well as from his brother Janus and myself. The burial itself was flawless.

Weeks later I journeyed to Minneapolis, where Martijn and I lived for ten wonderful years. There, the lakeside service was equally perfect. Held on a full moon evening, not even the customary Minnesota mosquitoes dared to ruin the atmosphere. David Fey and Michael Putman performed the music this time, and David, Suzanne Kochevar and Maureen Youngstrom read selections from the Maastricht ceremony. Afterwards, we lit floating candles which were sent like beacons of love out onto Lake Minnetonka, out from Sandy Beach where Martijn and I spent many, many happy hours. The candles drifted out to the lake like fireflies upon the water; others lit candles and held them aloft; our dear John and Sally Cuninghame stood on the pier proclaiming proudly when the full moon finally broke over the trees that line the shore. And then, wonder of wonders, Sally pointed to the fireworks that seemingly miraculously appeared on the horizon at the far end of the lake across from Cottagewood.

Weeks later the third and final ceremony took place in the galleries of dear friends, Ruth and Rick Snyderman in Olde City, Philadelphia. That night Hurricane Ike threatened the entire east coast, yet 40 sturdy souls weathered the storm. Nancy Carolan, this time, performed one of the songs, Allan and Sara Crimm, David Meyers, Bob Ingram, Barbara Craig, Kate Tasch and Alison Tasch recreated the readings. Martijn would have loved the storm. He loved nature and admired its ferocity. I remember the first time he ventured out into a real Minnesota blizzard. I warned him not to go walking on the frozen Lake Minnetonka but off he went, a later-day explorer. He made such treks a habit, reveling in the elements.

I returned to Maastricht, flying in on the notorious anniversary of September 11th. It was not easy coming into Amsterdam's Schiphol airport and finding myself alone for over an hour. Martijn would always be there - hours before the flight would be scheduled to arrive, usually with mother and Marcel. Always a warm greeting a reunion. REUNION. A reuniting of two souls destined to be

together, as our Kabbalah wedding vow says:

From every human being there rises a light that reaches straight to heaven and when TWO SOULS who are DESTINED to be TOGETHER find each other, their strings of light flow together and a single brighter light goes forth from their united being.

My life has been torn asunder. My string of light struggles to shine with the "Usness" that Martijn believed would continue after he no longer physically was here shining together with me. I have had to weather additional storms alone. My immigration status here in the Netherlands is threatened due to some bureaucratic bungling; the life insurance policy that should have been readily available to me is being held hostage while the faceless monsters who 'regulate' it conduct a criminal investigation to assure themselves that Martijn is truly dead; one of my clients, who owed a final payment for work performed held back for weeks my last invoice; like the rest of world, my hard won savings for retirement dwindled as the greed of more faceless vultures impacted my modest and conservative investments for the future. Martijn died and my world fell apart.

He who was always there with a joke and a gentleness to assuage even the most critical time is now a spirit whose presence I must allow myself to feel. Grieving, dear friends, is journey not an event. I take one step forward and two back. I sense a future that my beloved wanted for me, for our ethereal "Usness" but at times all I feel are hot tears that well up unbidden in my eyes and run like streams toward some unknown soul ocean. I will be strong. I will have faith. I am grateful to you, my many angels on earth who lift me, but please don't expect me to move through this loss any faster than I can and than Martijn deserves. Such a love as our is such a loss as time and space must heal. I do not cherish this pain for anything more than an acknowledgment of how great my joy was when Martijn walked among us.



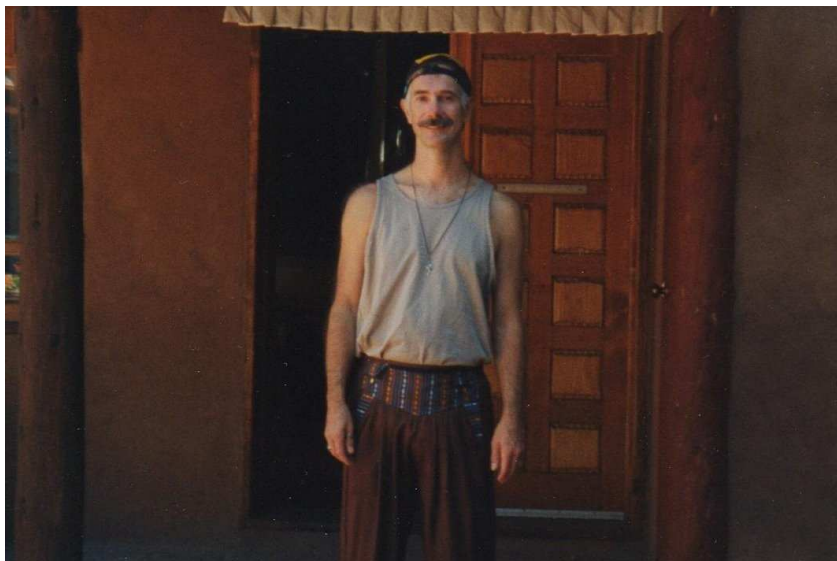
This photo was taken by dear friend, Carol Malkinson, at the hospital in October 2007

A year ago

Thu Oct 23 13:37:00 CDT 2008 |

My strong vivid beloved, even after radical surgery, showed such bravery. My dear friend, Carol Malkinson came to stay with me to give her love and support.

I had been sitting staring at the computer screen the other night hoping, as I sometimes do, that Martijn would talk to me. Whalah, Carol was the messenger and this reaffirmation of our love and connection was the reply.



Martijn, Sante Fe, New Mexico, October 1999

Give it all up to be with you

Sat Nov 01 06:56:00 CDT 2008 |

It is November 1, 2008, nine years since our carefree trip to sunny New Mexico, where we spent two weeks in the loving care of our dear friend, Rick Ruff. In the above photo Martijn stands before the Tibetan Rug store, dressed in his Tibetan pants. We intentionally purchased one of our Asian rugs from this store, since proceeds went directly to peace efforts to restore the Tibetan people to their rightful land and culture. This was a most delightful trip for us, with Rick serving as a gallant host while we explored this desert region we both so adored. Martijn and I were truly soul mate travelers. Our countless trips and adventures fill me with joyous memories.

Right now I am listening to music to heal my soul. There is a song by Donovan that expresses one part of how I currently feel: "Give it All Up" from the album, *Sutras*, by Donovan Leitch

Here in Maastricht I continue to heal and grieve. That is the way. I have learned much from the best book for anyone who has lost a love to death: *How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies*, by Therese A. Rando, Ph.D., recommended by beloved friend, Sally Eves, Ph.D., also a psychologist who works with patients in grief occasionally. Since I so depend upon my good

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friends, and care about how they feel for (and worry about) me, I quote this passage from Dr. Rando, which clearly identifies the need for people to not run from their grief:

Recognize that you must yield to the painful process of grief. ...[T]here is no way to go over, around, or under grief - you must go through it. Grief cannot be delayed indefinitely; it will erupt in some way, directly or indirectly. The inescapable fact is that you have sustained a major loss requiring a painful period of readjustment that demands excruciatingly hard work and causes more pain and trouble if you do not attend to it. If you want to get done with your grief, you must go through the pain. Although the pain is distressing, the experience and release of it is a healing part of the process.

And so it is. It is good for good friends to know and understand the wisdom that grief is hard work. It is work. It cannot nor should not be avoided or it may never be resolved. It is not a condition for which such toss-away sayings as: "Get on with your life" or "Stiff upper lip" are helpful, as well-intended as some may mean these to be. There is a difference between a healthy acceptance of one's loss with its concurrent acceptance of the pain and a prolonged never-ending depression. Good friends of those who have suffered a major loss should rather ask respectful questions regarding how we feel, how we're getting along, what we need.

So, it was very meaningful to receive the email copied below from one of my cherished friends from my Master's Program here in Maastricht. I respect and care for Anne and was comforted by her text:

Hey Susan,

I hope you are well even though you are going through a difficult time. I can imagine how hard it is to settle in this new situation, even if you knew it was coming. But I am sure your optimism and your curiosity about life and all the new impressions and situations it brings up will help you to find your way. I sometimes thought in the last weeks, that your emotionality might make it a bit more difficult for you than it would be for others to look ahead, but in the end I believe it is the best way to cope instead of burying unfinished thoughts and unsaid feelings inside. I believe in you :-)

...

All the best

Anne

To all my precious and wonderful friends, thank you for walking this journey with me. Please know how much your love and support means to me. I think about each friend I have often and cherish her/his contribution to my life. I am making 'progress', if you wish to call it that. I am moving toward my future, but only with your love and care, and of course, with the incredible spirit of Martijn that truly communicates with me. Today, he returned as a blackbird, just like he said he would, during a moment of decision-making. I do not make this up!

All my love, Susan



*With Aaron, Emily and Roberta
Washington, D.C.*

Yes We Can!

Wed Nov 05 00:17:00 CST 2008 |
YES WE CAN

Many years ago Martijn and I stood proudly before our nation's Capitol (seen just over my head in the background) with our dear friend, Roberta Strickler, and children Aaron and Emily Meyers. Husband David snapped this shot. Aaron and Emily are now adults and probably up celebrating along with a vast majority of Americans on this historic day.

Martijn adored Washington, D.C. and tonight I think he and all the other angels are dancing with President-Elect Barack Hussein Obama's recently deceased grandmother for his, and our, historic victory. Yes, America can change, perhaps better than any nation on earth. Tonight as I stayed up into the wee hours I wished that my beloved Martijn were here beside me to hear and witness greatness. But I know his spirit is soaring, as is mine, over this turning point in world history. Now I can say after so long a time, "I am proud to be an American." I have hope that once again my country can participate with other free people around the world in making decisions that contribute to a better, brighter future for citizens of the earth.

So my sincere congratulations to Senator Barack Obama, his family, his team on this amazing victory. Now, along with that puppy for his daughters we need to see a cat in the White House, too! You can't be the president of all people without representing dog AND cat people! Be well, be wise and laugh often! Cheers.



Our Wedding, St. Valentine's Day, Wednesday, February 14, 1996, The Whitney Hotel, Salon 2

Martin's Wedding Vows

Wed Nov 12 03:57:00 CST 2008 |

Each day of our life was a celebration of our union.
Our Wedding Script:

Parents of Martijn: Gertrude Mullens Hermse & Matthieu Hermse (deceased)

Family of Martijn: Elly & Paul Kerckhoffs-Hermse (Merel, Jony & Jolieke)

Jan Hermse & Irma Timmermans (Tjeu Colijn)

Noel & Lea Hermse-van Engelshoven

Parents of Susan: Emma Schaefer & Jack Schaefer (both deceased)

Officiating: Judge Tony N. Leung

Music: Sir Tim Heitman

Cake: Sir Daniel Hennagir

Flowers: Mistress Betsy Hork

Chariot: Mistress Suzanne Kochevar & Sir Richard Hecht

Guest Book: Mistress Roxanna Rutter

Candles & Ritual: Mistress Suzy Jandl Queen

Circlemakers: Sirs John Cuninghame, Daniel Hennagir & David Fey;

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Mistresses Betsy Hork, Suzy Jandl Queen & Roxanna Rutter

Rings: Sir Alan Heugh

PROGRAM

Prelude: Bach -- Minuet 1 & 2, First Suite

Ceremony: Judge Leung

Vows: Martijn & Susan

Interlude: Bach -- Bourrie 1 & 2, Suite #3

Circle Ritual: Jandl Queen, Rutter, Hork, Cuningham, Hennagir, Fey

Postlude: A Royal Surprise

Breakfast feast: Salon 3

Martin's Vows to Suze

DEAR SUSATSKA AND ALL OUR GOOD FRIENDS WHO GATHERED
HERE:

THE WEDDING OF TODAY IS FOR ME NOT ONLY A FORMAL JUDICIAL PROCEDURE ACCORDING TO THE LAW. IT IS ALSO AN AFFIRMATION OF MY LOVE TO YOU, SUSATSKA, A LOVE THAT STARTED IN A VERY ROMANTIC WAY. NOT VIA ADVERTISEMENTS, NOT PREDICTED, EXPECTED OR SOCIALLY ENGINEERED, BUT BY THE SIMPLE COINCIDENCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES THAT HAVE LED TWO SOULS TO CONNECTING AND INTERTWINING THEIR LIVES. ONE COULD SAY THAT THEIR TWO SOULS ALREADY KNEW THAT THEY WERE BOUND FOR EACH OTHER. THEY DIDN'T MEET EACH OTHER UNTIL LAST YEAR IN THE NETHERLANDS.

AS A BACHELOR I ALWAYS HAVE FELT A CERTAIN DISTANCE TO THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE. NOT ONLY BECAUSE MY PARENTS WERE MARRIED IN A NON-PREPARED WAY AND THAT THEIR MARRIAGE WAS NOT SO HAPPY AS IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN, BUT ALSO BECAUSE OTHER FORMS OF STRONG RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TWO PERSONS ARE STILL NOT SUFFICIENTLY ACKNOWLEDGED BY SOCIETY. ALSO THE MANY DIVORCES WHICH HAPPEN STRENGTHENED MY OPINION THAT THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE IS THREATENED IN SUCH AN UNSTABLE SOCIETY AS OURS.

FROM THE OTHER HAND, THERE ARE THE POSITIVE ASPECTS THAT MADE ME DECIDE TO MARRY SUZY. IN THE FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT PLACE, IT IS MY REAL FELT LOVE TO YOU, SUSATSKA. APART FROM MY PARENTS AND DOROTHÉ, A GERMAN WOMAN I FELL IN LOVE WITH A LONG TIME AGO,

I HAVE NEVER LOVED A PERSON SO MUCH AS I DO YOU, SUSATSKA. I JUST HAVE TO LOOK AT YOUR FACE AND THEN I AM IMMEDIATELY AWARE THAT ONLY YOU CAN GIVE ME THE FEELING TO BE FREE AND ACCEPTED THE WAY I AM, WITHOUT SAYING ANY WORDS. IN THE ROMANTIC VIEW, LOVE IS THE EXPERIENCE OF ETERNITY IN THIS

LIFE. IT IS A SPECIAL FEELING OF TIME AND SPACE THAT GIVES THE NORMAL REALITY ANOTHER COLOUR AND FACE. THIS WHAT WE PROVIDE FOR ONE ANOTHER.

ANOTHER REASON TO MARRY YOU HERE AND NOW IS THAT WE HAVE REACHED A MATURE AGE. I AM NEITHER AN ADOLESCENT ANY MORE, NOR A GRUMPY OLD MAN YET. SO, THIS IS THE EXACT RIGHT PHASE IN MY LIFE FOR STARTING SOMETHING NEW IN A SERIOUS WAY. WE KNOW THAT A GOOD AND LASTING RELATIONSHIP IMPLIES HARD WORK, BUT IT ALSO IMPLIES MAINTAINING OF ABILITY OF PLAYING LIKE CHILDREN OR DREAMING LIKE ARTISTS. THIS, TOO, WE BOTH BELIEVE IN.

BEING IN A COUNTY OTHER THAN MY NATIVE COUNTRY MEANS I STILL HAVE TO LEARN MUCH ABOUT PRACTICAL THINGS. SO, WHENEVER I NEED YOUR HELP, I HOPE YOU CAN GIVE ME SOME SUPPORT. AS A PHILOSOPHER AND AS A WISE-GUY I CAN GIVE YOU MY HELP ABOUT THE ESSENTIAL ISSUES AND ENIGMA OF LIFE. TO CLOSE, I ALSO WANT ON THIS OCCASION TO MEMORIALIZE MY FATHER, MATTHIEU, WHO DIED LAST AUTUMN, AND WHO, LIKE MY MOTHER, GERRY, MY TWO BROTHERS, JAN AND NOEL, AND MY SISTER, ELLY, WOULD LIKE TO HAVE BEEN HERE. AND I ALSO WANT TO MEMORIALIZE SUZY'S PARENTS, JACK AND EMMA -- MAY THEY LOOK AT US AND BLESS OUR RELATIONSHIP.

MARTIJN ANNA ANTONIUS HERMSE

ONE YEAR IN MEMORIAM

July 21, 1952 - July 25, 2008

Time only
strengthens
our love

Susan Schaefer, wife

Gerry Hermse
Mullens, mother

Janus Hermse,
brother, and family

Elly Kerckhoffs, sister,
and family

Joel Hermse, brother
and family

Marcel Winten, friend



**We remember and celebrate
the life of our beloved Martijn**

For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun?

And what is to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?

Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing.

And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb.

And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance.

- Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*

One Year in Memoriam

Fri Jul 17 05:47:00 CDT 2009 |

It is difficult to conceive that almost a year has passed. On Saturday, July 25th, family and friends will gather at the graveside and then continue on to the astoundingly beautiful home of Martin's Aunt Sybil Houben at the nearby village of Geulle. Martijn loved his aunt and her home. We will say a few words at the cemetery and hopefully be able to truly celebrate the life of this most genuine, gentle and loving husband, son, brother and friend to so many of us: Martijn Anna Antonius Hermse
One Year In Memoriam

July 21, 1952 - July 25, 2008

**We remember and celebrate
the life of our beloved Martijn**

*For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun?
And what is to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides,
that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?*

Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing.

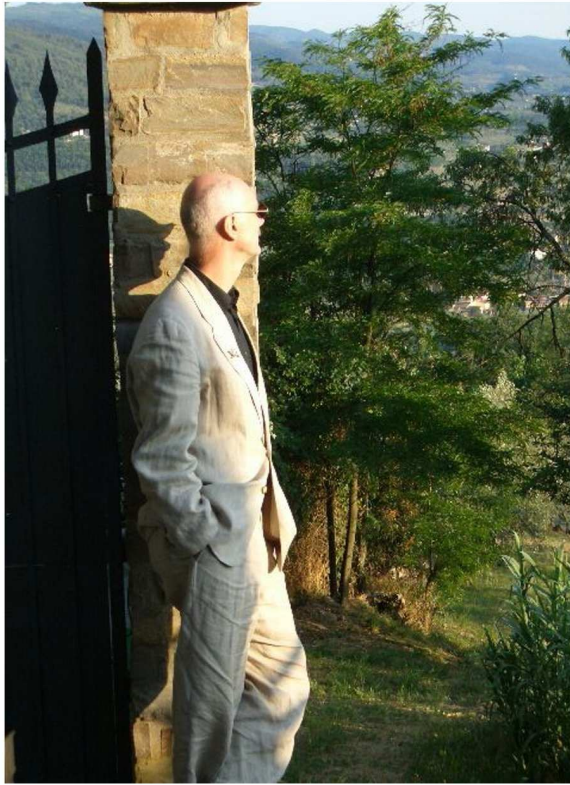
And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb.

And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance.
- Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*

*Time only strengthens our love
Susan Schaefer, wife
Gerry Hermse Mullens, mother
Janus Hermse, brother, and family
Elly Kerckhoffs, sister, and family*

*Noel Hermse, brother and family
Marcel Winten, friend*





*Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing.
And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to
climb.*

And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance.

-The Prophet, Kahil Gibran